MOONS OF DEATH *by* DAVID V. REED

fantastic ADVENTURES

MAY 20c

THE INVISIBLE ROBINHOOD RETURNS IN

LAND of the SHADOW DRAGONS *by* EANDO BINDER

Also Stories by McGIVERN ★ WILCOX ★ NORMAN

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You have probably known several cases like that . . . the medical records report lots of them. And they all lead up to this warning:

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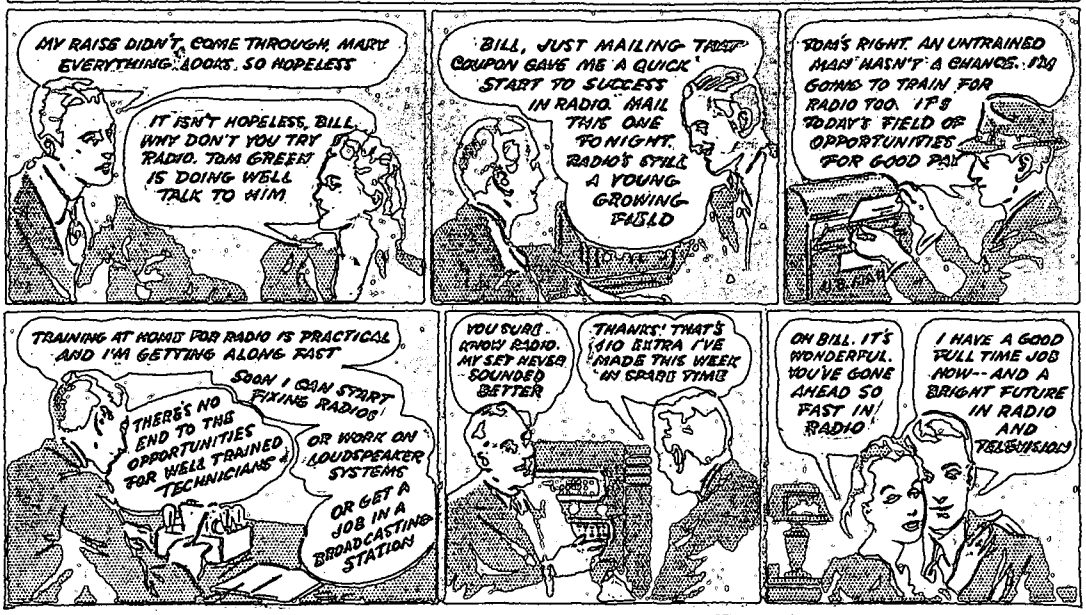

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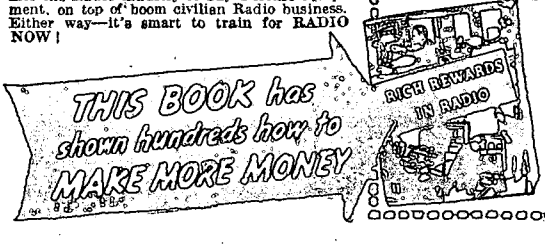

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VOL. 3
NO. 3

Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Cover painting by Robert Fuqua depicting a scene from "Land of the Shadow Dragons"
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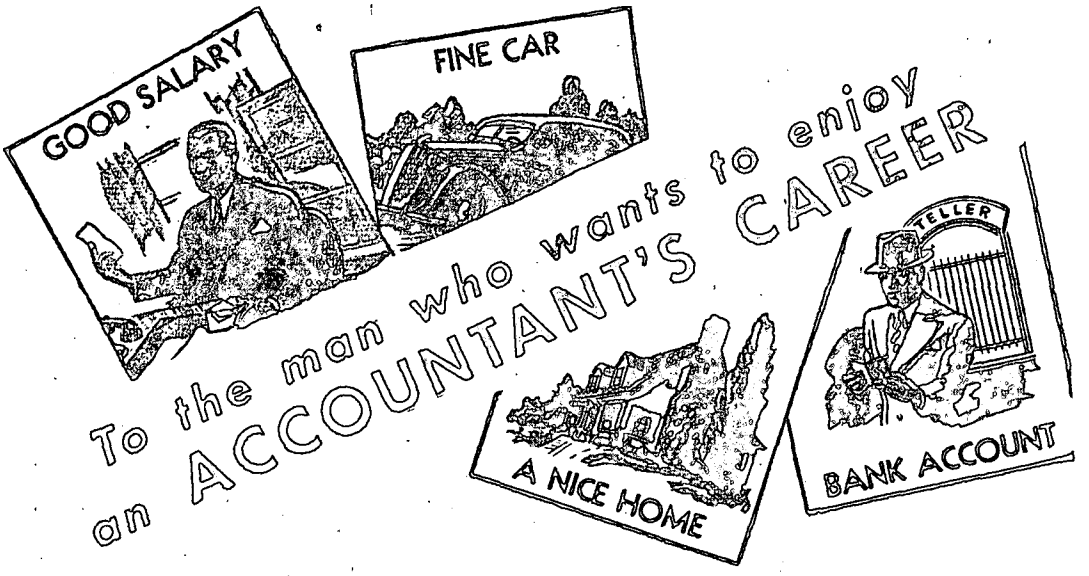

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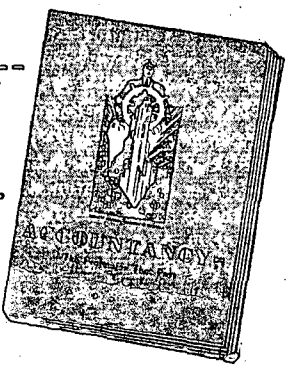

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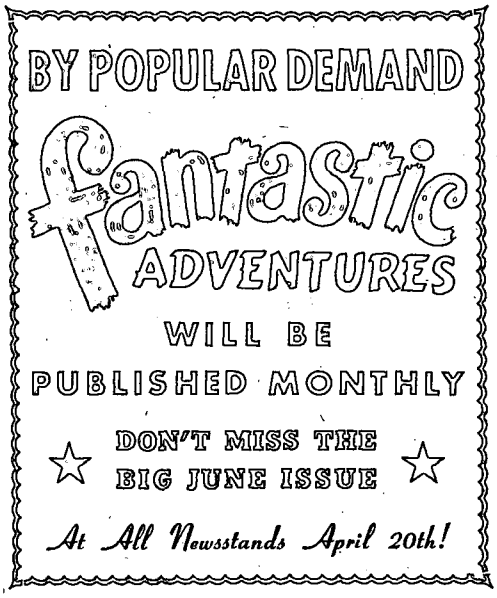
The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

AS you read this sentence, you already know the good news—about FANTASTIC ADVENTURES going monthly with the June issue. We made up our minds in a hurry, just as we were going to press with this May issue. And the reason we made this quick decision? Well, the editors want to thank the readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for the many encouraging letters, and the many requests that we publish the magazine every month. We are pleased that our latest issues have met with your complete approval, and with some very fine stories on tap, we are going to go "double" immediately, so as not to let them go "stale," if that word could ever apply to the treats on tap *every month* from now on!



JUST as a teaser, how about these, for that first monthly issue?

"The Druid Girl" by Ray Cummings, featured by McCauley's "Mac Girl" in another sensational cover scene. It's easily the best work of both men, and Cummings' story is proof that he has hit the "comeback" trail with a vengeance.

Another returning favorite is Eando Binder with another "Little People" story.

Then there's Jep Powell, our newest writer, with "Amazons of a Weird Creation," which is a rather unusual story, we confess.

But let's not reveal any more. We won't have any suspense left, if we do. All we *will* say is that it's a top-notch lineup!

PERHAPS one of the most exciting bits of forecast information we can give you is the news that Nat Schachner, the old master, is coming up in August with "The Enchantress," as fine a fantasy as we've ever read!

And in July we have James Norman's great character "Oscar of Mars" in his third thrilling adventure. Oscar bids fair to become a legend in fantasy fiction. Don't miss this one, by any means! We're warning you now!

ALL of which points to some of the things in this issue. This seems to be "comeback" time! For instance, here's the Invisible Robinhood, who made such a hit back in July 1939, our initial issue. Binder has penned another adventure of this modern champion of justice.

And David V. Reed returns after a long absence with a swashbuckling story that'll burn your ears off for sheer action and suspense. It's fine stuff! He'll be back again! He's scheduled for "Kid Poison" very soon in our companion magazine, AMAZING STORIES. If you like good interplanetary stuff, watch for that one!

Next, there's Don Wilcox with the second of his new kind of story, the true fantasy. Let us know what you think of "Three Eyes In The Dark" will you?

And our humorist, William P. McGivern hits us again with the most hilarious adventure of them all—and with a complete novel! Laugh? We think you will!

BY the way, if you haven't gotten that big 15th Anniversary issue of AMAZING STORIES, don't fail to dash out right now and nail a copy. It's the biggest ever, and crammed with your favorite writers and artists. 244 pages of entertainment plus!

WE have a fantastic crime-wave on our hands! Listen to this, from recent newspaper stories. It reads like FANTASTIC ADVENTURES!

Steubenville, Ohio—An entire mile of track was stolen from a Pennsylvania Railroad spur!

Chicago, Illinois—An apartment building under construction was looted of 158 bathtubs!

Little Falls, New York—A granite monument weighing 1,600 lbs. was stolen from Jas. Hallinan!

(Concluded on page 123)

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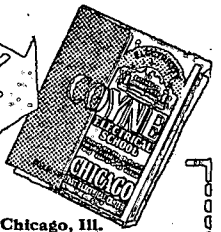

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LAND of the

The jar filled slowly with the blood of the invisible deer.

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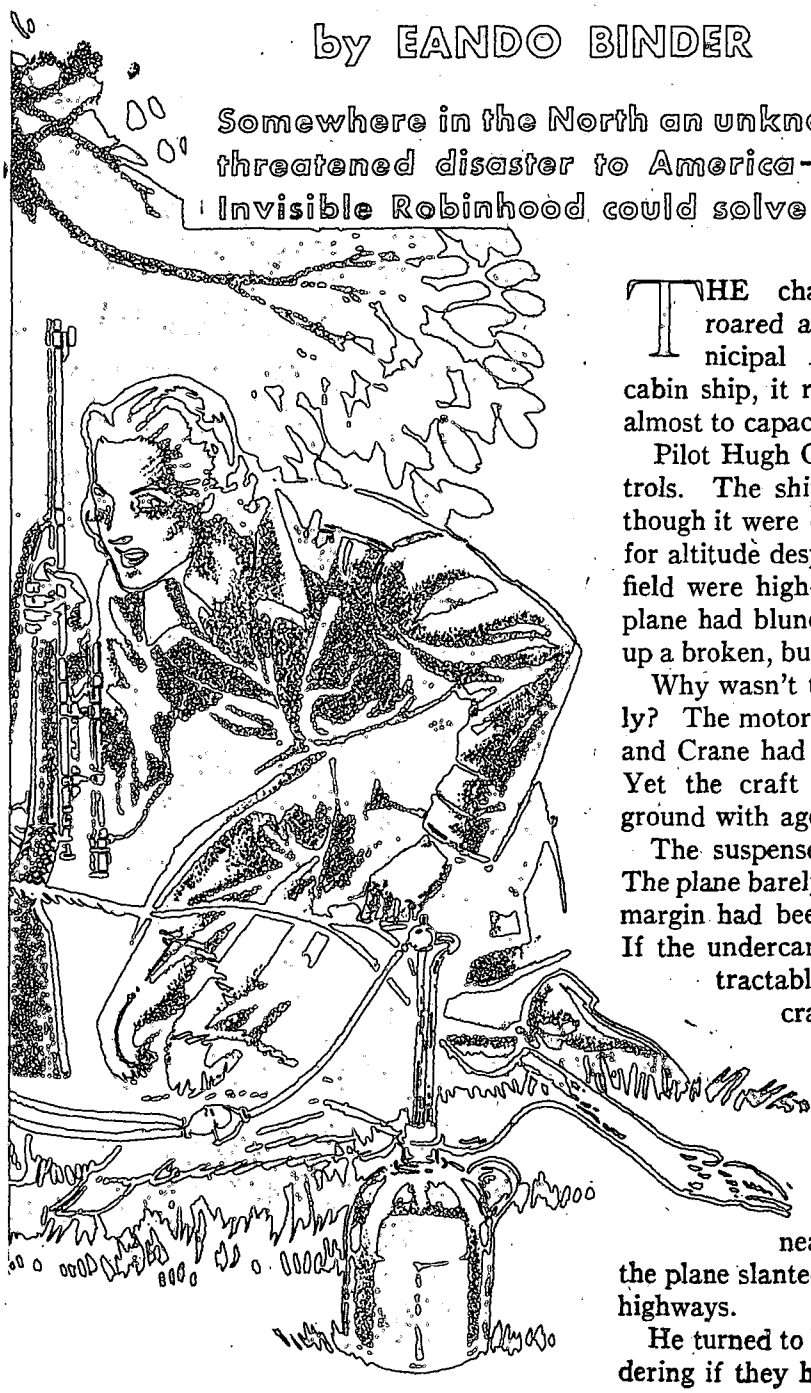
Shadow Dragons

by EANDO BINDER

Somewhere in the North an unknown menace threatened disaster to America—unless the Invisible Robinhood could solve its mystery



THE chartered plane's motor roared as it left Chicago's Municipal Airport. A low-winged cabin ship, it raised sluggishly, loaded almost to capacity with crated supplies.

Pilot Hugh Crane tensed at the controls. The ship was acting almost as though it were overloaded! He gunned for altitude desperately. Far down the field were high-tension wires. Once a plane had blundered into them, ending up a broken, burning mass of junk.

Why wasn't the plane rising normally? The motor hummed smooth as silk and Crane had full control of ailerons. Yet the craft inched itself from the ground with agonizing reluctance.

The suspense was over in seconds. The plane barely cleared the wires. The margin had been uncomfortably close. If the undercarriage had not been retractable, the ship would have crashed.

Crane unclamped his lower lip from his teeth. In his years of piloting, he had never come that near to disaster. But now the plane slanted up into the safe aerial highways.

He turned to his two passengers wondering if they had noticed.

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"Rather a poor take-off, wasn't it?" Paul Harlan said sharply., "We were careful not to overload the ship, according to airport instructions and inspection."

Crane knew he wasn't going to like Harlan. Tall and dark, he seemed about Crane's age, under thirty. His bearing was stiff and cold, his lips straight and thin. A man who would play his own game, given the chance.

Ignoring the words, Hugh Crane addressed the girl in the side seat.

"Where to, Miss Damon?"

She did not reply at once.

Dawn's glowing red arc brightened in the east, revealing the girl more clearly. Crane's brief glance formed a staccato impression. Figure tall, slender. Features regular except for a slight upturned nose. Type, titian blond. Clothing mannish for roughing it — boots, leather breeches, suede jacket, tam o'shanter. Total effect, not bad!

"You will fly due northwest," the girl directed. Her tone was preoccupied.

"To what, or where?"

"Our destination is near Great Bear Lake, Canada."

"Which side of it?" Crane pursued.

A frosty stare accompanied the girl's response.

"As I told the airport officials, that's my business. I paid for the privilege of having an uninquisitive pilot!"

"Ouch!" Crane said mentally.

What kind of trip was this? Why all the secrecy? He took a longer look at the girl. No, she wasn't just a wealthy madcap, out for a lark. There was quiet purpose in her hazel-brown eyes. Almost grimness.

"I can't go by those general directions," Crane ventured. "Not all the way. A plane isn't something you can amble around in aimlessly. After all, Miss Damon—"

Jondra Damon interrupted with a toss of her head.

"You're being difficult. When we reach Great Bear Lake, I'll give you more specific instructions. If that doesn't satisfy you, turn back! I'll get another pilot."

For a moment they glared at each other. Then Crane shrugged and turned eyes front. The girl was within her rights. He had been instructed to fly where she wished, within the range of risk to life and ship. Beyond that, the officials had said—or known—nothing of the eccentric arrangement.

WHAT was it all about? Crane began to feel he was flying in some sort of mystery. To Crane it wasn't exactly an unpleasant thought.

The girl's hand touched his shoulder. She was suddenly smiling.

"I didn't mean to be so abrupt. But I really can't explain much more at present. My father is up there—Dr. Sewell Damon. He's conducting experiments. Mr. Paul Harlan, who answered my ad last week for an experienced chemist, is to assist him. The exact destination is being kept secret as long as possible at my father's request."

She added, after a moment's hesitation, "I think he fears—well, spies."

"Spies!" Crane echoed the word with a start. "What sort of experimenting is he doing?"

The girl shook her head, but not angrily. Her eyes suddenly gleamed with worry. She spoke in a low murmur.

"I think he may be in danger!"

She arose, as though to pace the narrow cabin floor.

"Sit down!" Crane snapped. Hastily he added, "Sorry, but it's the best thing to do while flying."

But before the girl could obey, the

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ship lurched through an air pocket. The girl seemed about to stumble and fall backward. But miraculously she didn't, as if a hand had caught her arm just in time.

"Thanks!" she smiled at Harlan, gaining her seat.

Harlan stared at her blankly. He had had no chance to help her, half sliding out of his seat himself.

"What — " he began, but then shrugged. It was hard to talk above the drone of the propellor.

Crane's quick glance behind him had taken in the episode. Again things seemed verging on the mysterious. First the plane, apparently overloaded. Then the queer mission they were on. Now the girl, acting as though an unseen passenger had assisted her.

But there was no such passenger. She had imagined that someone had helped her keep her balance.

THE plane drummed northwest. The countryside below became steadily more bleak and rugged with each degree of northern latitude.

Ten hours later, Hugh Crane turned to Jondra Damon, dozing in her seat. He hated to disturb her, but now was the time for directions. She looked like she hadn't had proper sleep for a week, in preparation for this strange venture.

"We're within a hundred miles of Great Bear Lake. Might tell me now exactly where you want to go."

Jondra Damon rubbed her eyes. "Fifty miles east of Great Bear, directly on the Arctic Circle.

Minutes later, a snow squall came up, chilling the heated cabin.

Crane pondered. "If the snow gets thicker," he said, "I'll have to land on the first level stretch. But maybe we can make it to your destination. What are we looking for? Any landmark you can name?"

"It's a valley," the girl responded shortly, lighting a cigarette.

Crane looked helplessly at Harlan.

Harlan shrugged. "I know as little about it as you do," he grunted.

At the same time he eyed the girl as though he, too, resented being kept so much in the dark.

Jondra Damon blew out a cloud of smoke imperturbably.

"I thought it was women who were always curious. Now look, you're both paid to do as you're told, and paid well. You, Mr. Harlan, were hired at ten dollars a day to help my father when we arrive. You, Mr. Crane, were engaged to land the plane where I state, help unload the supplies, and then leave. It's simple enough, isn't it?"

"But the valley!" Crane said patiently. "I presume there's a big sign somewhere saying *valley* in big red letters?"

The girl flushed. "Oh! Well, it's a sunken valley. Father informed me that it should stand out from the air by itself."

Crane shook his head, but went back to his controls.

Reaching Great Bear Lake, he cruised over its eastern shore, and swung gradually away in a wide circle. The snow thickened, making a landing imperative within an hour. Crane swept his eyes from horizon to horizon for the valley. A sunken valley. What in the world would it look like?

A hand gripped his shoulder suddenly, turning him slightly. Then Crane saw it himself—a dark gash in the general whiteness of snow-tufted land.

"Yes, that must be it!" Crane said, wondering why Harlan was so mysterious, grasping his shoulder and not saying a word. He looked around, but Harlan was now beside the girl, peering down.

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What was the man's game? Crane thought fleetingly. Had he known how the valley would look, despite his pretended ignorance of the whole thing? Was he keeping things from the girl, as well as the other way around? What was in that valley—gold, radium?

He'd soon find out. Crane zoomed for the spot. Circling and lowering, he made out the barren floor of the valley, with only an evergreen here and there. A landing could easily be made in the valley itself. It was sunken, all right, at least three hundred feet below general level, with sheer cliffs at every side.

"How queer it looks!" Jondra Damon was murmuring at his side, peering through the windshield. "Watch out for the snow . . ."

IT struck Crane too. Swirls of snowflakes dropped into the valley and seemed to hang. Momentarily, they seemed to form the ghost-shapes of tall trees. Crane felt a qualm of uneasiness, but quickly killed it. One could see anything in clouds or snowstorms, with a dash of imagination.

"No time to waste," he warned. "We're going down. Hold on!"

Heading into the wind, Crane slanted down for the broad, smooth area at one end of the valley. There should be no trouble.

Suddenly a tiny figure emerged from some hidden shelter below, near a cliff-face. It ran madly into the open, swinging its arms wildly.

"It must be father!" Jondra cried. She peered closely. "He seems to be warning us away. I don't understand. There's something wrong!"

Harlan gasped. "The man's mad! He's firing his gun at us!"

Above the roar of the propellor sounded the sharp bark of a rifle. The man below was firing not at them, but in warning not to land! To stay away!

"I'm going to land anyway!" Crane yelled. "I've got to! Blinding snowstorm up above, and getting worse. This is a safer chance."

A hundred feet above ground, Crane gasped through tight-pressed lips.

Something had brushed against the undercarriage! He felt it jar through the ship, though he saw nothing! A keen instinct of danger knifed through him. He tried instantly to zoom upward again, but again something struck the ship.

This time it had been at the right wingtip, almost wrenching the wheel out of his hands. The plane dipped groundward sickeningly, like a wounded bird. With desperate strength, Crane straightened the craft just as the wheels touched ground.

Bouncing badly, the plane rumbled over the rough terrain. It rolled almost to a stop, but abruptly struck something with a stunning impact, shivering through its entire length. Crane found himself thrown in a tangled heap with his two passengers on the tilted cabin floor.

The motor coughed to silence, luckily, eliminating the danger of fire if any gas had spurted out of the wing tanks.

CHAPTER II

The Invisible Spectre

HUGH CRANE picked himself up dazedly, then pulled the girl to her feet. She lay limp in his arms for a moment, half stunned. Finally her eyelids flew open. The warm color of her eyes was washed over with terror that faded, and wonder that grew.

"What happened?" she asked weakly. "Why did the plane act as if it had struck something?"

"Struck something!" Paul Harlan

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stood beside them, dark face glowering, a bruise over his right eye. "Bad piloting, that's all," he growled. "First he nearly wrecks the ship in taking off at Chicago. Now he nearly puts us down in pieces!"

His voice rose harshly. "Spies! Your father is worried about spies, you say. I just wonder if this Hugh Crane is a licensed pilot at all. Or if he's using his right name!"

Jondra Damon's eyes widened. She stepped back from Crane.

"Father warned me to be very careful, and now—"

"Good God!" Crane exploded. He'd had to bite his lips to keep from swinging at Harlan. Now the stark suspicion in the girl's eyes added fuel to a mounting rage. He didn't have to take this from anybody!

He lunged at Harlan, driving his fist forward.

The blow never landed. Crane was not quite sure why it didn't. Some force seemed to grasp his wrist and hold his arm back. He tried again, more enraged than ever.

"Stop!"

Crane whirled. The new voice had come from the swung-open door of the plane's cabin, with a bark of authority. A man leaned there, rifle upraised. Tall and thin, gray-haired, unshaven, boots and pants muddy, he looked the part of some desperate character. But there was intelligence in his high brow and level gray eyes.

"Dad!"

With the one word, Jondra flew to embrace him. He patted her head, then disengaged her gently, facing the two men again.

"I heard your little quarrel," he said casually. "Your nerves are upset by the close escape you had. Calm down, please."

Crane relaxed, anger draining from him as suddenly as it had come.

"You're Dr. Sewell Damon, of course," he said, and introduced himself and Harlan. He went on, grinning ruefully, "I was supposed to just land, and unload, and go. But I guess now I'll have to stay till I can make repairs."

The scientist's lips pursed behind a week's growth of beard.

Crane snapped, "If you think that's a spy's trick, so that I can stay and horn in on whatever you're doing here—" He shrugged indifferently.

Dr. Damon's eyes narrowed. His hand tightened on the rifle.

"If there's any spying, it wouldn't be healthy. The secret of this valley—"

"I don't want a dime of it," Crane growled. "Just tell me one thing—what spoiled my landing? Bad air-currents rising from the valley?"

DR. DAMON stared. "You haven't guessed?" he said slowly.

"Guessed what?" Crane looked blankly at Harlan, who was equally mystified.

The scientist turned. "Follow me."

The four stepped from the cabin. Dr. Damon dodged under the right wing and stood erect beside the motor cowling. There was a large round dent in the front wing-edge. Crane gaped at it.

"Exactly as though I'd struck a tree there, just before the plane stopped rolling."

"You did," Dr. Damon said.

"What? Where's the tree?"

Crane looked around for the fallen tree, but there was no sign of one within hundreds of yards.

"Look, Dr. Damon," he grunted, "I'm not in the mood for humor—"

A startled cry from Harlan interrupted. He had passed back of Crane, stretching his cramped muscles. Now

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he was toppling to the ground, for no visible reason—as if his legs had been knocked from under him!

Rising to his elbow, looking foolish, he slowly stretched out his hand near the ground. Crane watched in utter fascination as Harlan's hand seemed to meet something, and explore its outline. Harlan looked up with his foolish expression altered to one of ghastly shock.

With a smothered curse, Crane kneeled and stretched out his hand to the same spot. In mid-air he felt something—the bark of a tree! Solid and real to his sense of touch, but unseen by his eyes.

Harlan's whisper seemed to shatter the quiet air.

"It's—*invisible!*"

For a moment nothing more was said. The three newcomers to the valley looked at one another in dumb amazement, as human beings must when confronted by a wonder out of the realms of fantasy. Invisibility! A dream of science—and of superstition before that—come true!

Hugh Crane followed the length of the fallen trunk before he was satisfied. With his hands he felt the bole, the lower branches, and the upper foliage of some pinelike tree with needles and cones, knocked over by the plane.

He came back facing the scientist.

"So that's the secret of this valley, Dr. Damon! Not gold or minerals, but invisibility!"

The elderly man nodded slowly.

"It's a miracle that you landed without smashing up completely." He swept an arm around. "The valley looks bare to the eye, doesn't it? As a matter of fact, it teems with life! Trees, bushes, grass and animals. All invisible!"

THE others looked around. The level stretch of the valley floor was naked, to their eyes. Yet they realized now that between them and the cliffs must be a thousand unseen things. Jondra shivered. Crane could hardly keep from doing the same, overwhelmed by the eerie mystery.

Dr. Damon resumed. "By blind, lucky chance, you brought the ship down in a cleared patch of bush growths. Almost any other spot you would have cracked up against rows of trees."

"Fools luck," agreed Crane. "But why weren't we warned?"

"I tried to warn you away," the scientist reminded. "I fired my gun, hoping you'd go back and land up above somewhere."

"But why wasn't your daughter warned, before we even arrived?" Crane eyed the man accusingly. "You risked your daughter's life by keeping that so secretive!"

"No, I was told," the girl spoke up. "That is, father mentioned invisibility in a message to me. But he didn't tell me the whole story—that the valley is crammed with invisible trees and life."

"I couldn't," Dr. Damon said gently. "You might have thought I was mad." Then his voice sharpened. "But Jondra, I did warn you not to let the plane be landed in the valley, in my second message—"

"Second message?" The girl stared at him. "I didn't get a second one!"

Dr. Damon whirled.

"Pierre!" he cried. "Didn't you deliver my second message?"

Crane started as another figure silently stepped forth from the shadow of the plane. He had come up so quietly that the others hadn't known he was there. Black eyes, sleek black hair, emotionless features and buckskin garments tabbed him instantly as a French-Canadian guide and a roamer of the north country.

"Pierre, my guide," Dr. Damon in-

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formed them parenthetically. Then again he demanded: "The second message, Pierre. By heaven, if you failed to send it—"

"I send it," Pierre protested in a hoarse, taciturn voice. "I mail it from Good Hope, t'ree week ago."

"Then it was lost in the mails," Dr. Damon sighed. "Well, things have been uncertain right along, since the war. Thank heaven you're here safe and sound, Jondra. And you, Crane and Harlan. Sorry about your ship, Crane. I'll pay for the damages.

"You can stay as long as you need to repair it. Plenty of food supplies came with Jondra. I have a comfortable cave-home in the nearby cliff. Well, You're all probably tired and hungry. We can unload the plane tomorrow. Follow me."

The night was coming on. The three who had spent a dozen hours in the air were ready for food and rest. And shelter. A chill wind swept down into the valley, protected though it was.

As Crane stepped away from the plane, a thought ground forward in mind.

"Who turned off the motor, just after the landing?" he asked aloud. "Harlan, Miss Damon and I were on the floor, helpless. You, Dr. Damon, and Pierre were approaching. It couldn't be any of us." He grasped the scientist's arm. "There wouldn't happen to be—*invisible men?*"

Dr. Damon started. "Not that I know of," he vouched. "It's a preposterous thought. Your motor died by itself."

CRANE shook his head. "I'd like to believe that. But the ignition key was turned off."

"Then the jar of landing turned it," Dr. Damon retorted. "Don't let your imagination run away with you."

Imagination? Imagination that the plane at take-off had been heavily loaded? That Jondra Damon had kept on her feet in the bouncing air pocket? That a strange force had withheld his blow at Harlan? That a shock-cushioned ignition key had been turned by a human hand?

All imagination? Or did it add up to some mystery, strangely linked with this phenomenal valley of invisibility?

Crane didn't know. But he was determined to find out, one way or another.

CHAPTER III

Sabotage

PIERRE and Dr. Damon led the way. Harlan, Jondra and Crane followed in single file, carefully stepping in the exact path they broke. Blundering into an unseen tree would not be pleasant.

Dr. Damon kept one hand directly before him like a sleepwalker, for emergency, but seemed able to avoid invisible trees by some instinct. He stepped along sure-footedly, as did Pierre.

"From experience," he confided, "I can make out the trees. They aren't absolutely invisible. Nothing can be, except air and colorless gases. The trees throw a faint shadow that my eyes —and Pierre's—have learned to watch for. With the sun setting, the shadows are longer and more definite. Do you see them at all?"

Crane gradually made out the faintest of shadows slanting over what seemed barren ground. Like eyes adjusting themselves to gloom, he could squint and bring them up slightly. He sucked in his breath. There were hundreds of those long, faint shadow-streaks. A whole forest towered around them!

A forest of trees as solid as the ground, but as vagrant to the eye as

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smoke. Light went through them with less hindrance than through glass. It was amazing, almost incredible.

The ground was not barren, however, upon closer inspection. A carpeting of dead needles lay decaying over the ground, as in any pine forest. Here and there they stepped over logs and fallen trees, completely visible. Dead branches and sticks were in the visible spectrum.

"This valley's invisibility is confined solely to its living life-forms," Dr. Damon explained. "When a tree or animal dies, it passes into the visible." He stopped, pointing. "Look—a rabbit!"

Crane barely made out a faint trail of mist streaking across their path. Invisible animals roamed these invisible forest glens.

"There are also fox, deer, and I think bear," Dr. Damon elaborated. "It—"

He was interrupted by a blood-chilling roar that sounded faintly from far across the valley. Both Pierre and the scientist jerked their heads, exchanged a glance, and gripped their rifles more firmly.

"Lynx," stated Dr. Damon briefly.

"Are you sure it wasn't anything bigger?" Crane asked. "I just thought I saw a shadow thrown momentarily across the far cliff wall, near where the sound came from. It was the outline of—"

Crane stopped. He had been about to say something preposterous.

"Lynx," repeated Dr. Damon tersely.

Crane saw the scientist's surreptitious glance at his daughter. He kept still. But the shadow aside, the roar itself had never issued from the throat of a mere lynx. Of that Crane was dead certain.

A NATURAL rock overhang formed the roof of Dr. Damon's valley dwelling. It extended back fifty feet in the base of the east cliff wall, which was three hundred feet high. Logs set upright to enclose the sides of the rock pocket were of Pierre's handiwork.

The space within was warm, dry, with a hard-packed floor. Pierre, with his kind's resourcefulness, had also fashioned several items of crude furniture—chairs, tables and low bunks cushioned with pine needles. One new bunk had been added, obviously for Harlan.

"You hadn't meant for me to stay, then," Jondra said. "There's danger here, Dad! You wouldn't say it in the message, but there is danger. I can feel it!"

Already unnerved by the hazardous landing, the girl's face was strained. It was not a light shock suddenly to see—or not see—a valley of shadow-things in an otherwise normal world.

"Danger of stubbing your toe!" Dr. Damon forced a laugh and chucked his daughter under the chin. "Food and sleep are what you need, all of you."

Pierre had already begun boiling a stew of jerked beef and onions over a stone stove just outside the pine-slab door. They ate looking out over the now-dark valley. It was not so eerie with darkness substitutiing for invisibility. The unseen forest creaked and rustled under a whipping wind from regions above.

Crane woke twice in the night, on his unaccustomed bed of pine needles. Pierre sat dozing before the smouldering fire he kept up against the night chill of the northern latitude.

But the second time Crane woke up, Pierre was standing erect, staring out over the valley of shadow-life. His expression in the firelight was strange —fierce and determined.

Pierre would bear watching too, Crane told himself. Had he delivered

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that second message, or not? If not, why not?

UNLOADING THE plane took the better part of the next day. Pierre, Harlan and Hugh Crane shuttled between the plane and cave with arms full, Pierre leading. Besides food supplies for an extended stay, there were crates of apparatus and chemicals.

Dr. Damon unpacked the latter eagerly, and set the items up on a long table previously made for the purpose, at the back of the cave. His laboratory workbench. Crane felt growing wonder at the array of test-tubes, flasks, hypodermic needles, morphine, alcohol and more complicated reagents.

"Now I'll get somewhere," the biologist asserted, rubbing his hands together. "Pierre wasn't able to pack more than a few pounds of equipment here to me from the small town of Good Hope, northwest of here. I'll have the answer soon."

"Answer to what?" ventured Crane, nettled at the man's secretiveness.

Dr. Damon's gray eyes veiled themselves.

"How long will it take you to repair your ship?" he countered in a tone that meant, "How soon will you get out of my way?"

"I don't know, probably a week or two," Crane lied.

Brief examination had shown him that the ship could leave now. The motor was intact, also the fuel tanks. The left wing was rather badly ripped, and the undercarriage out of line, but with most of its former load gone, the plane would take off easily in the same cleared stretch they had miraculously landed in.

THE plane was ready to go, but Crane wasn't. Not till he was sure Jondra Damon was in no danger. He couldn't leave a girl—any girl, of course—in the midst of unknown risks.

"You have a radio in the plane?" Dr. Damon said. "If you contact your airport, to tell them of the delay, I'll trust you not to reveal this valley's exact location. Name your price and you'll go back with my bank draft—"

"No sale," Crane snapped, angered at the cheap approach. He turned on his heel, aware that the scientist was staring after him with narrowed eyes.

He trudged to the plane, following the trail now marked with stones, winding through trees that he could feel with his hands in passing, but whose bulks were as transparent as air.

The wonder of it was somewhat subdued this second day. His thoughts revolved more around the undertow of human cross-currents gradually shaping themselves.

He passed Pierre on the trail, lugging a box on his broad shoulders. Reaching the plane, Crane stepped into the cabin. Harlan was there, and he turned with a startled air.

"The doctor's supplies are all in the fuselage compartment, not here," Crane said coldly.

Harlan's shrug was studied.

"I suppose now I'm some sort of spy?" he retorted sarcastically. He stepped out to hoist a box to his shoulders, leaving.

Crane glanced around the ship. What had Harlan been doing? Then he saw . . .

When he left a minute later with the last box, his eyes were hard. He strode rapidly. He set the box down inside the doorway of the cave, and straightened with grim accusation on his face.

"Who smashed the plane's radio?" he demanded, eying them one after another. His glance came back to Harlan. "You were there last, Harlan."

"You'd have heard it if I did it,"

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Harlan returned easily. "I was just ahead of you—don't you remember?" His eyes flicked to Pierre significantly.

Pierre's beady eyes met Crane's, then shifted.

"Pierre wouldn't do it," Dr. Damon declared quickly. "I know him too well."

Crane ground his teeth.

"Someone did it! It was done between the time I talked to you last, and went to the plane." He smiled grimly. "If Harlan and Pierre are eliminated, that leaves—"

"How dare you!" Jondra Damon blazed, stepping before him. Neither Dad nor I would do such a thing. You could have done it yourself, since accusations are in order!"

Crane threw up his hands.

"I'm getting tired of all this!" he exploded. "That radio was our only emergency contact with the outside world, since the plane is damaged. Someone in this group smashed it, for reasons of his own. What's more—"

He stopped suddenly and ripped free a lath of the crate he had last brought. Reaching within excelsior packing, he drew out something by a handle and held it up.

"Grenades!" he hissed. "Potato-masher type. You say there is no danger here, Dr. Damon, yet you had your daughter bring rifles and hand grenades. Are the mosquitoes that big here?"

Jondra had shuddered at sight of the grenades She clutched her father's arm.

"WHY did you have me bring them? You must tell me!"

A swift, disturbed look came over the scientist's face. Then he drew a smile over his features.

"You're both being foolish," he laughed. "The grenades are handy for any number of things, like blasting down trees."

He turned away, in dismissal of the subject.

"All right," Crane said calmly. "I'm going to repair the radio if I can. Then I'm going to signal the authorities and ask for an investigation. Something isn't right here!"

He stamped back to the ship. In the cabin he sat down and waited, without touching the radio. The set was beyond repair. He knew that from the start. His threat, he hoped, would smoke out something. Far worse than groping through an invisible forest was this groping through undefined human purposes.

Who would come, sneaking around now, to see if he was repairing the radio? Who was it that wished them isolated from the outside world — and why?

He tensed at a sound—the soft pad of feet under the wing outside. He slowly inched up till his eyes peered over the windshield ledge. Not a soul was there! Puzzled, Crane sank back.

The sound repeated itself a while later, just outside the cabin door. Crane crouched, waiting. When the sound was near, he rushed out, arms extended, ready to knock away a gun if the intruder carried that.

He gasped in chorus with a startled shriek. Jondra Damon was tight in his closing arms. Releasing her, he stepped back.

"You, Miss Damon? But—" Crane was more confused than at any time before.

Color flushed into the girl's paled cheeks. And then suspicion leaped into her eyes. Crane was almost grimly amused. He realized his actions must be as queer in her eyes, as hers in his.

"Sorry," he murmured. "Let's call it quits between us. Frankly, I thought

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the one who had smashed the radio would show up, not you."

"Thanks for the implication." She answered his grin with a smile. "I came to ask you something—"

"Yes?"

Her hand touched his arm, before she went on.

"I trust you, somehow. I want you to guard my father, every minute of the day!" The words came in a rush now. "I feel his life is in danger. I feel there's something in this valley—something horrible — that threatens him. Maybe all of us! Will you guard him for me, Mr. Crane?"

Suddenly she was in his arms again, but not by accident. He crushed her to him.

"Yes," he whispered fiercely. "And I'll guard you too—Jondra!"

She struggled free, her eyes wide, startled. She turned.

"Let's go back to camp," she said quietly.

CHAPTER IV

Ally Unseen

JONDRA DAMON hurried down the trail, Crane following. The redolence of pine forest was around them, and the rustle of branches in the wind. Almost, Crane could vision the trees themselves, and the girl tripping lithely through them. She glanced around once or twice, her hazel eyes glad to have him as an avowed friend in this queer adventure.

A hundred yards from the plane he caught her hand, striding beside her despite the danger of colliding with a lurking shadow-tree. He wanted to say something.

"Jondra—"

Crane was interrupted by an ear-splitting roar. They froze in their tracks. Then there sounded the crackling of undergrowth, and the lumbering of some form through the forest toward them!

Jondra cowered in his arms.

"Something's coming at us!" she cried. "Something big—and invisible!"

Crane had already come to that conclusion. He shoved the girl ahead of him, back toward the plane. It was nearer than the camp. They sped as fast as they dared down the marked trail. Invisible bushes dragged at their ankles. Behind them sounded the heavy tread of some nameless beast, snorting and growling ferociously.

"If we could only see it!" Crane groaned.

But on second thought, perhaps it was better not to. No bear or tiger, or any creature Crane could think of had made the noises they heard. Its roar had come from a huge, rumbly chest. Its ponderous feet thumped against the ground with more than elephantine force.

In the name of the universe, what frightful monster was pursuing them, uncatalogued in any zoo or book on Earth?

Crane prodded the girl ahead faster, feeling blind and helpless. What chance to escape the invisible horror? Its growlings drew nearer, and imagination or not, Crane felt a hot fetid breath on his neck. Once it seemed to squeeze between two close-set trees. There was a crack, as one tree gave way.

Just as they reached the wing-edge of the plane, Jondra stopped short with a shrill scream. Crane saw it at the same moment—the ghostly shadow of the creature, cast ahead of them against the nearest cliff-wall.

Crane's own mind and muscles turned numb. A mighty body reared in silhouette, at least twenty feet high.

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Great triangular spines ran the length of it. Two thick legs pumped thunderously, upholding the body like a kangaroo. The short forelegs displayed claws that could rend apart an elephant at one stroke. At the end of a serpentine neck slavered huge ridged jaws of more than crocodile magnitude.

Unwisely, Crane shouted the one word to describe it.

"It's a *dragon!*"

Jondra went limp with a little moan of utter terror, slumping against the wing-edge. Crane half swept her in his arms for a desperate run to the cabin, but released her. There wasn't time. By the size of the shadow ahead, the behemoth behind must be within striking distance.

Sobbing in haste, Crane ripped open his jacket and drew out the masher-grenade he carried. He thanked his stars for suspecting he might need it, after discovering he'd brought them here. He gripped its handle, facing the oncoming beast.

IF he could only see to throw!

Pulling the pin, he flung it blindly, judging as best he could by sound and instinct where the creature was.

There was a dull roar as Crane flung himself over the girl's form, head down. A second later he heard the majestic crackling of a shattered tree, toppling and crashing its length through the other pines. Branches whipped across his pilot's uniform, bruising him through the fabric. The tree had very nearly smashed down on them.

The grenade had done that—blown down a tree. But had it stopped the beast? The monster's roar had echoed the explosion.

And now the beast's bellow sounded again—nearer and utterly enraged. Crane had missed! In another second ferocious jaws would crunch through him and Jondra, snuffing out their lives. Crane winced, waiting for the death stroke.

He wasn't sure what happened then. The whole sequence was a blur of sound. He seemed to hear a second grenade explosion, just after his own, clipping off the beast's angry roar. And then from its throat issued a scream so piercing that Crane quivered as if stabbed.

Head ringing, he could hear little more. He sensed that the beast had gone. Picking himself up dazedly, he looked around. But he could see nothing!

That was the ghastly part of it. He couldn't see the fallen tree, or the retreating monster, or any sign of the explosion save a swirl of settling dust. It was like a nightmare. Figures suddenly catapulted through the dust clouds, shouting. Dr. Damon was in the lead, with a grenade, Harlan and Pierre behind with rifles. Pierre shaded his eyes and stared down the valley, evidently at the fleeing beast.

Dr. Damon picked up his daughter, rubbing his cheek against hers, muttering.

"So, that's what the grenades were for!" Crane hissed. "Why didn't you warn us that dragons run around loose here? You pretty nearly fed Jondra to them, you old fool!"

"Let me explain," Dr. Damon said tiredly. He eased the girl back, and continued.

"Six months ago I trekked with Pierre past Great Bear Lake, for first-hand glimpses of Arctic life-forms. I'm a government biologist, retired. We stumbled into this valley. It's almost undetectable from ground level. I doubt if any white man has ever been here before. We almost fell into it before we knew it was here."

He went on, as though finally aware

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he must tell the whole story.

"We circled the cliffs and found one spot where you could climb down, at some risk. Finding the astounding phenomenon of invisible life-forms here, I decided to stay for a study, sending Pierre back now and then for pack supplies. Finally I sent the message to Jondra, for more material, in order to make a more permanent stay.

"My idea was simply to have the supplies delivered, and then Jondra would return with you. I didn't want to tell of the dragons, for then she would either insist on staying with me, or worry herself to death back home.

"I still hoped, after the bad landing, that that you would repair the ship and leave with her before the dragons became evident. I was only trying to keep it all from Jondra, for her own peace of mind.

"Not knowing you, Crane, I couldn't tell you either and be certain you wouldn't tell her."

HE gulped for breath and went on. "So now you know the final secret of this valley. If there's been any mystery about all this, it's cleared up now."

"Is it?" challenged Crane. "I'm not so sure." He shrugged. "Anyway, I begin to understand a few things. Thanks, Dr. Damon, for tossing your grenade in time."

The scientist stared. "I didn't throw one. I wasn't near enough to, before it was over."

"Then who did?" Crane asked slowly. "I could swear my grenade missed the beast. A second one went off immediately after, chasing the beast away. Didn't you hear two explosions?"

Dr. Damon shook his head, Harlan and Pierre following suit.

"We heard one explosion, then a tree crashing and the beast screaming. There was so much confusion of noise that you merely imagined you heard another grenade."

"Take the credit due you," Harlan said dryly. "Your grenade did the trick. You're a hero."

Crane ignored the sarcasm, but started a little, meeting Jondra's eyes. She had come to quietly. There was no sarcasm in her eyes, only a deep silent thanks that made him turn away, flushing.

The girl sat up. "I heard every word you said, dad," she stated, "about the dragons. If you're staying, so am I."

Dr. Damon looked at Crane helplessly. That was that!

BACK AT camp, the excitement over, Crane addressed the scientist while they ate their evening meal.

"Why not explain the rest, Dr. Damon?" he suggested. "What experimentation are you carrying on? And why have you wanted the valley's location kept secret from public channels? I think Harlan and I are entitled to know."

The scientist stiffened, as though to refuse. But when Jondra touched his arm, he relaxed. He smiled self-consciously.

"I suppose I have the foibles of any scientist who has stumbled on a great thing. This is one of those phenomena that crop up only once a century. If the world heard about it, a hundred biologists would be swarming up here overnight.

"Can you blame me for wanting to keep it to myself—for a short while anyway? Studying it, recording data, and then announcing it in one grand moment?"

Crane smiled. All his suspicions of Dr. Damon's motives vanished in a flash. He was simply a scientist-miser with a bag of gold, figuratively. He had

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heard before that, contrary to general belief, scientists were often childishly jealous of their individual discoveries, and loved the limelight as well as any other human soul.

That took care of the scientist. But what of Harlan? And Pierre? Why had they acted strangely at times?

Crane temporarily shelved the matter.

"What accounts for the invisibility?" he queried.

The bustle of arriving and unpacking, and the battle with the shadow-dragon, had kept them busy. But now the thought loomed—why should this isolated valley bear only invisible life-forms? It was unheard of in the annals of science.

DR. DAMON'S tone became academic.

"I've learned a little, and surmised a lot, in the six months I've been here. It traces down to a certain type of grass, which has the property of invisibility. The herbivorous creatures eat the grass—rabbits, deer, etc. The carnivores—bear, fox, weasel, lynx—eat *them*. Excrement and decaying bodies go back to the soil—and back to the vegetation, including trees, bushes, moss. It's a closed cycle, mutually kept up, as it would be in any isolated valley."

"But what causes the invisibility itself?" It was Harlan who asked, leaning forward.

Dr. Damon's tone became vague, dreamy.

"Perhaps it goes back a long way, in evolution. Evolution tries anything and everything. What does vegetation—to personify it—fear most? Being eaten. And being *seen!* If it were invisible, it might escape the crunching jaws of planteaters.

"Thus ages ago evolution may have tried this offshoot species, protected by invisibility. It failed, because of the animal sense of smell. It vanished in evolution, as so many abortive life-forms have. Only here in this valley it survived, and stayed to the present day."

He waved a hand. "Sheer speculation, I admit. But however it happened, the invisible vegetation is here, and the resulting invisible animal life."

"But what is the exact *agent* of invisibility?" Harlan insisted.

Crane didn't like the tenseness in the chemist's voice, nor the eager way he waited for an answer.

"That's what I want to find out," Dr. Damon returned. "And where you come in. Between us, we may be able to find out. I suspect it's a hormone, a gland-product. Transparent life-forms are not unknown, of course—jellyfish, many worms, tropical fish, etc.

"A jellyfish is practically invisible in water. Thus it is hidden from its enemies. Its protoplasm is no different from ours, but contains gland-products that render it highly transparent.

"The same thing, to a much more marvelous degree, has occurred with this valley's life-forms. Their protoplasm is just as material as ours, but almost completely transparent to light."

Crane nodded. "Clear enough," he punned.

"But the dragons!" he asked in the next breath. "Why should there be invisible beasts never heard of before?"

"Not dragons—dinosaurs," smiled the biologist. "A species of them closely related to the extinct *Tyrannosaurus rex* fiercest of them all. The dinosaurs died out, millions of years ago, in competition with rising mammalian life. But this invisible species had just enough edge to survive, though it has narrowed down to this lone valley."

Dr. Damon's voice lowered almost in awe.

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"What we've stumbled on, in this protected valley, is the last vestige of one of nature's great experiments—invisibility.* It's like finding live saber-toothed tigers, or mastodons, or submen."

THEY all felt it—an air of having been projected into a strange and ancient vault of Earth's long past. Empires of life had risen and fallen, like empires of man. Perhaps the Unseen Life had once lorded it over Earth, only to give way before keener-nosed, sharper-eyed species.

It was a chapter of evolution that had been totally unsuspected. The *dead* forms of the Unseen had all fossilized into opaque stone, leaving no slightest clue to their one-time invisibility in life.

Harlan broke the silence.

"You think, then, that you and I may be able to isolate this invisibility hormone?"

"Not here," Dr. Damon demurred. "It would take years of work, in a well-equipped laboratory. The best we can do is collect samples of blood from these creatures and bring them back to civilization for that laborious research. The blood will contain the hormone. That's our job, Harlan."

The scientist rose. "Let's get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we're going out hunting—for invisible game!"

"You kill?"

Crane started. It was a surprise to hear the taciturn Pierre speak up of his own volition. The French-Canadian's expression was again strange—almost protesting.

"Yes, why not, Pierre?" Dr. Damon said, surprised.

"Hard job," Pierre grunted, turning away.

But Crane felt he hadn't said what he meant. What went on in the guide's secretive mind? And secondly, why was Harlan so keen on the invisibility angle itself?

When he went to bed, Crane asked himself another startling question. He had counted the grenades. There were four cases, containing six each, according to the bill of lading.

Two were missing!

Who had flung the second grenade?

CHAPTER V

The Man in the Mists

THE hunt the next day proved a strange one.

"I know something of the layout," Dr. Damon asserted. "Pierre and I explored the valley quite a bit. I even made a map."

He displayed it before they started. The valley was roughly five miles long and a mile wide. It was densely wooded in the center, but more thinly at the ends where sunlight was often excluded. The invisible vegetation needed life-giving rays the same as any normal growths, absorbing nourishment

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* Author Binder here propounds one of the most interesting propositions ever advanced in science fiction. What if, in the great long ago, certain species of mammals and plant-life acquired the power of almost complete invisibility, as a protective coloration against the encroachments of more aggressive animals and more sturdy life-forms?

Even today there are certain species of animal and fish life which, when in danger, can so alter their color as to blend with their natural surroundings, thus confusing their enemies and warding off destruction.

The theory of invisibility has long intrigued science fiction and fantasy writers, and many fine stories on this fascinating theme have been published. All sorts of suppositions have been put forth as to invisibility in man—peculiar bodily makeup, the ability to acquire this strange phenomenon through an outside agency such as secret chemical formulas or intricate atom re-integrated machinery.

But perhaps Nature is wiser than all the wiles of chemistry and electricity, even as Author Binder suggests.—Ed.

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through a colorless form of chlorophyll in their transparent leaves.

"Deer browse and sleep in the central section," the biologist resumed. "We're after them."

"Where do the dragons hang out?" Crane wanted to know more practically.

"Anywhere," Dr. Damon said briefly.

"I'm going along," Jondra declared firmly. "I won't stay at camp and bite my nails."

The scientist shrugged, without an argument.

"Well, we have the grenades," he said.

"I'm going along too," Crane stated.

"But the plane—"

"Will keep," Crane finished shortly. "Besides, I'm a good shot."

The scientist seemed pleased. "We can use another man with a rifle. Let's go."

Pierre leading, they trekked single file toward the center of the valley, brushing past unseen vegetation.

Crane looked around. Sheer, steep cliffs on all sides. They had kept the outside world out, and the things within from escaping. But the average temperature, it occurred to Crane suddenly, was hardly Arctic. In two days, none of them had been forced to wear more than mackinaw jackets.

"There are steam springs in the central area," Dr. Damon explained. "This valley was formed, ages ago, by the sinking of land into a volcanic bed. The underlying heat works up through the soil, keeping the valley warm.

"No seeds flying up out of the valley can take root in the cold, snow-covered regions above. Thus the invisible vegetation has been confined."

They saw the steam springs soon after, puffs of vapor rising from porous ground and curling vagrantly into the air. Often the ghostly shapes of trees and flowers would be outlined for a moment, revealing the verdant character of the invisible forest before them.

Singularly, here and there an ordinary pine stood plainly in view, green and solid.

"Some seeds drift down into the valley from above and take root. Seeds of the common visible variety."

Crane suddenly chuckled.

"Hunting invisible deer! Most hunters have a devil of a job bagging one they can see!"

"You think we're fools to try?" countered Dr. Damon imperturbably. "Wait and see—"

He broke off and held up a warning hand. The line stopped. The scientist pointed ahead.

Two hundred yards beyond, a steam spring's vapor wound lazily around and around a clump of bushes. Off and on, like the shutter of a blinking light, it outlined the form of a deer lying hidden. Sensing human presence and the consequent danger, the creature was on its haunches, ready to leap away.

BUT it was still there—a pefect target. The steam silhouette betrayed it, robbing it of the advantage of invisibility.

Pierre was slowly bringing up his rifle, with the caution of an experienced hunter. The others held their breaths. The gun streadied, then barked, sending echoes crashing back and forth between the cliffs.

Crane saw that Pierre had missed. The deer had leaped away at the crack of the gun, with all the lithe grace of its kind. It vanished utterly, passing beyond the steam curtain like a fading dream.

"What's the matter with y o u, Pierre?" Dr. Damon snapped irritably. "First time I knew you to miss a perfect shot like that."

The French-Canadian stood dazed,

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looking at his rifle in stark disbelief.

"Something push barrel," he mumbled. "Spoil shot."

"If that's the best excuse you can think of—" The scientist glared at the man, then waved the party on. "Well, we'll try our original scheme. We won't find and more deer lying that conveniently in view."

He explained his plan. "You've said frankly you're a poor shot, Harlan. So you be our beater. Make a circle near the cliff edge quietly, and then cut straight toward us. Any deer you scare up will run our way.

"Now, there are three main springs ahead. Pierre, the one at the left. Crane, the middle one. I'll take the right one. Between the three of us, we eventually should bag a steam-silhouetted deer."

The scheme was carried out. Harlan, carefully picking his way through the invisible forest, made a wide circle, then stamped noisily toward the three men with ready rifles. Two deer were seen leaping through the steam curtains—but away instead of toward them. Disconcerted, Crane's shot went wild. Pierre and Dr. Damon hadn't even tried to fire.

"Deer gone here now," the scientist muttered. "We'll try again in an hour."

The results were the same. The deer were again leaping away from them, at an angle they were unprepared for. No one fired.

"What's wrong?" Dr. Damon rasped, his temper short. "You must make too much noise circling, Harlan."

"I don't!" the chemist snapped back. "If you ask me, something else scares them first, before I get near—and from the other direction."

"A dragon?" Jondra gasped in alarm.

"Of course not," her father snorted. "We'd easily hear him."

An hour later, Harlan tried again. Three deer came leaping. At the instant Crane saw a silhouette over his steam spring, he tensed to swing his rifle from right to left. The deer's motion the other way—from left to right—completely disconcerted him. There was no use to shoot blindly, a second later, at the portion of thin air into which the deer had dissolved.

"Damn!" he grunted. "We'll never get them that way. They just don't come from the right direction. What's doing it?"

HARLAN came back with a sober, almost frightened face.

"I think I saw—" he gulped.

"A dragon?" Jondra asked again.

"—the shape of a *man!*" Harlan finished.

His four listeners gasped. The thought of an invisible man, more than even the frightful dragons, sent chills down their spines.

"I saw it way ahead, running through the steam curtain, swinging its arms and chasing the deer away before I could get near. He must have made enough noise to scare the deer, though they couldn't see him."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Damon had recovered and almost yelled the word. "You're all letting your nerves go. Pierre and I have been here six months without running across this mythical invisible man. It was a bear walking upright, naturally.

"Now scare up the deer again, Harlan. And don't picture your grandmother in the mists next!"

Crane this time deliberately watched for the deer to be scared up from some point opposite Harlan. When a steam silhouette did appear, he had the exact bead. The crash of his gun hurled from the nearest cliff.

In his eagerness, arriving first at the spot, he yelped as an invisible hoof cracked him smartly on the shin. He

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stared down. On the grass before him lay a creature kicking in its dying reflexes. He could actually see only one thing—the mushroomed bullet hanging apparently in mid-air, lodged in an invisible heart.

Then he saw more. A pool of liquid was slowly outlined at his feet and began to tinge with a faint ruddy hue.

"Quick, Jondra!" Dr. Damon panted, running up. "The incisor and pump."

Jondra opened the case she had carried all morning, handing over the instruments. With the skill and speed of experience, the biologist inserted a large hypodermic in an invisible jugular vein. Crane and Harlan sat on invisible animal legs that were still striking out. Dr. Damon attached rubber tubing and pumped transparent blood into a series of flasks.

"Haemolin—sodium citrate!" he barked at Harlan.

Harlan dumped the prepared solutions in the flasks, reagents that prevented coagulation and deterioration. It was all done in a minute.

The blood-drained body beneath Crane shuddered, gave a final heave, and was still.

"Watch!" Dr. Damon commanded.

Slowly the corpse took form. Inner organs misted into being, rapidly solidifying to visibility Then overlying tissue precipitated out of thin air. Muscles sprang into being. A vast network of veins and arteries snaked into vision. Finally hide, hair and hooves appeared.

In the space of fifteen minutes, an ordinary deer lay before them, no different from its cousins in the outer world. With the passing of life and the breakdown of the delicate invisibility hormone, flesh hidden from human eyes had dropped into the visible spectrum.

It was uncanny, eerie, like a magician's trick perfected to an impossible degree.

"But its blood is still invisible!" Dr. Damon crowed, holding one flask up.

To all appearances the flask was empty, clean. Even the refractive index of the solutions added had been largely erased.

"The secret of invisibility—in a flask!" Harlan murmured.

CRANE glanced at him sharply. The man's eyes were enigmatic.

Jondra shuddered and turned away from the scene.

"Let's go back to camp—"

"What? Without taking along delicious cuts of venison?" her father scoffed.

Pierre already had his knife out and was expertly skinning the carcass. Soon after he was carving off choice steaks. The strong, salty smell of fresh meat rose into the air.

Crane fidgeted. "Isn't this rather risky, in case one of the dragons—"

As if at a signal, a blasting roar thundered against the confining cliffs. A dragon had crept close, attracted by the smell, its noises camouflaged by the steady hiss of the surrounding steam spring. A treetop cracked, no more than a hundred feet away. In seconds the monster would be upon them, clawing and rending.

The five froze into the paralysis of fear.

Crane broke from it with a groan and fumbled for the grenade slung on his belt. Dr. Damon and Harlan were too stupefied to even remember them, or bring up their rifles.

Crane pulled at the pin with fingers of rubber. Before he could draw it, a hand clutched his wrist in a grip of steel.

"Pierre, you fool!" Crane snarled. "Let me go—"

"No kill beast!" Pierre muttered.

They struggled. The sound of mon-

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sters feet pounding heavily against their ears. Only seconds were left . . .

The grenade's roar drowned out the triumphant bellow of the behemoth about to overtake them. A frightful scream shattered the air, as of a creature mortally wounded. Violent thrashing sounded, as a mighty body writhed in death agony. A tree crackled and toppled, brushing at the five humans now stumbling away.

They stopped and faced one another, a hundred feet from the danger spot, pale, trembling, shaken to the roots of their souls at the narrow escape.

Dr. Damon suddenly let out a jubilant shout.

"It's dying right on the spot! More blood! Come on, all of you, back to camp for more bottles—"

Not till an hour later, after they had returned, did the reptilian monster give its final gusty sigh of death. One last swish of an invisible tail flung dirt, needles and splintered branches in all directions. Then all was quiet.

The scientist brought up with a jerk as Crane held him from running close.

"Let go!" Dr. Damon screeched. "I have to pump that blood out before it's too late."

"You'll wait five minutes, till we're sure he hasn't one last kick in him," Crane said firmly, holding the biologist tight. "That tail, if I know anything about dinosaurs, could bash in the side of a locomotive."

Jondra touched his hand and flashed him a smile of thanks.

But the monster lay still, and in fifteen minutes they had drained gallons of viscid fluid into the jars they had lugged from camp. Harlan dumped in wholesale quantities of his preserving chemicals.

THEN they watched, gasping, as the corpse passed, by degrees, into the optical realm. Thirty feet long, from snout to tail-tip, spined, armor-plated, huge as a house, it lay in a mass of trampled vegetation and half-splintered trees which more slowly assumed a visible status in death.

It was the first dinosaur seen by human or near-human eyes for an unthinkable age.

"Look what it took to kill it!" Harlan said, awed.

The exploding grenade had torn out its entire chest. Bullets alone would have been a laughable farce against the gargantuan creature.

"Thank heaven for the grenades!" Dr. Damon breathed. "I'm wondering now how Pierre and I dared to sneak around for six months with our pea-shooters, under their very noses!"

He turned with a glowing face, waving at the bottles filled with invisible blood.

"We owe you our lives, as well as this, Crane. You tossed that grenade just in time!"

Crane said nothing. Obviously the others, paralyzed in blind terror, hadn't seen that desperate moment when he struggled with Pierre. He looked at Pierre, but the impassive face avoided his. Pierre had no explanation for his astounding act.

But what bothered Crane the most was something else.

He hadn't thrown the grenade! Nor had Pierre or the others! An unseen hand had done it.

Had there been a man's shape in the steam mists?

CHAPTER VI

The Invisible Robinhood

THE following day dawned clear and bright. But there was a cloud in Crane's mind. He watched Dr. Damon

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and Harlan busily transferring the blood to sealed cans, at the workbench.

Jondra watched moodily. This was not the right environment for her. Her feminine nerves would give way in a few more days.

Pierre sat in the sun, staring out over the valley, as though observing the shadow-life.

Crane's churning mind strove to put the jigsaw puzzle together. Why had Pierre wanted the dragon to live? And what lay veiled in Harlan's cold eyes?

And was there a fifth man—invisible—in the valley?

Crane strode to his plane, in sudden alarm. This was their only way of getting out of the valley—as a group. If someone had other plans.

Too late! He knew it the moment he entered the cabin. The panel-board lay smashed by a wrench from the tool chest. The drive-wheel had been battered to bits, and the steering post bent and twisted out of shape. The plane was useless, beyond repair!

They were trapped, in the valley of invisibility!

Crane stood cursing. It had been done the night before. Harlan or Pierre? Or—a chill went down his spine—the unknown presence?

Returning on the trail to camp, Crane held his rifle grimly. Harlan, Pierre or the invisible man? It surged through his mind like the beat of a drum.

Pierre still sat impassively before the cave entrance. His beady eyes did not turn. Crane watched him for a long, cautious moment. Was he shamming, fully aware that Crane must know of the ruined instrument board? Was he waiting for Crane to make the first hostile move. . . .

"I'd advise you to drop your gun!"

Crane whirled. It was Harlan in the doorway, half smiling. An automatic in his hand pointed straight for Crane's heart.

Caught off guard, Crane had little choice. He dropped his rifle. Pierre, starting from his daze, was tensing preparatory to lunging for his rifle, a yard away.

"Easy, Pierre!" Harlan warned, and the French-Canadian relaxed. "Now step to the right, both of you, away from your guns."

As they complied, Dr. Damon and Jondra came running out.

"What is this, Harlan?" the scientist demanded testily. "What—"

He gasped, seeing the gun.

Harlan herded them all together, unarmed and helpless before his automatic. He looked from one to the other with undisguised triumph.

"So it was you, Harlan!" Crane said. "You smashed the instrument panel so we couldn't leave the valley. What's your game?"

"I can say it in one word—invisibility!" Harlan retorted.

"You mean you want the secret of invisibility for yourself?" Dr. Damon guessed belatedly. "Why? For what earthly purpose? Harlan, this is outrageous—"

"Shut up!" Harlan grinned strangely. "For what purpose? Can't you guess? You mumbled about it all morning. That a person could take a dose of that animal blood with its invisibility hormone—and become invisible himself!"

CRANE cursed, but at himself. Why hadn't he seen that before? The secret of invisibility was of incalculable significance. From the first, Harlan must have plotted to hog it.

Harlan resumed. "Last night, Crane, after smashing the panel-board, I used your batteries. They furnished power for a little private radio in my belt. I

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sent a prearranged signal, to friends of mine. They should arrive, by plane, in an hour or so. You called my hand, but a little too late.

"We'll take all those cans of blood. And then we'll leave the valley—alone!"

The plain, brutal threat sent icy rage through Hugh Crane. His muscles knotted, and a growl rasped from his throat.

"Watch yourself, Crane!" Harlan yarned. "I prefer to let my less squeamish friends do the job. But if I have to, I'll fill you full of lead! This is too big a thing to stop at anything. No one will ever find the four bodies rotting away in an undiscovered valley on the Arctic Circle."

Crane leaped away. It was a desperate gamble, but Pierre might have a chance to get at Harlan afterward. Better the try than tamely to wait for certain death later.

Crane's big body lunged forward like a football tackler, toes digging in the dirt. Head low, he aimed for Harlan's legs.

Jondra screamed. Crane knew he could never make it. The ugly snout of the automatic leveled straight for him. Harlan's finger began to squeeze. Crane mentally winced, waiting for the slugs that would churn through his brain.

A shot rang out . . .

Harlan had missed! Another shot . . . four more shots . . . and still no bullet touched Crane!

It was an impossible miracle. And then Crane gasped. He stopped short, staring at the amazing phenomenon occurring before him.

Harlan stood in a strangely unnatural position. His right arm was stiff before him, the wrist bent, the automatic pointed upward where he had pumped the useless shots. It was exactly as though a man had grasped Harlan's wrist from the side, jerked his arm up, and twisted the wrist!

Yet there was no man there.

Harlan gave a shriek suddenly, as his wrist almost turned in a complete circle. His arm looped awkwardly back and he staggered in an off-balance position. A moment later the automatic dropped to the dust from Harlan's nerveless fingers.

The automatic bounced once, then miraculously rose into the air by itself, pointing at Harlan. The chemist reeled back, groaning with the pain of his bruised wrist, and at the unnerving sight of his own gun, unsupported, threatening him.

"It's an invisible man!" Jondra whispered.

Crane tensed himself again. Friend or enemy? Had they been rescued from Harlan only to face a new menace?

"Who are you?" he demanded.

A LOW, quiet voice issued weirdly from a spot just above the gun, held by an invisible hand.

"I'm known as the Invisible Robinhood."

Crane's mouth fell open.

"The Invisible Robinhood? You mean that publicity myth that stirred up the country last year?" *

"Publicity myth?" The unseen man chuckled. "Yes, I suppose most of you hard-headed people never did quite believe I actually existed as an invisible man. For a year I spied and tracked down criminal rings, and still no one believes I exist. No one except the criminals whose careers I ended, and

*In the first story built around this character, (July, 1939) The Invisible Robinhood was built up through the press as the champion of right, and it was the phrase of the day: "Who knows, even at this very minute he may be at your elbow! Think twice before you act!"—Ed.

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my one confidant and contact man. Well—"

Crane could almost see the invisible shrug. Then he gasped, as his thoughts pierced back and back, through haze of mystery.

"You were with us all the time!" he exclaimed. "The take-off at Chicago—the plane was overloaded because of your added weight. During the flight, you once kept Jondra from falling. It was your hand on my shoulder that first indicated the valley to me, from the air.

"You kept me from striking Harlan, when he criticized my landing. You turned off the ignition key, to prevent danger of fire!"

Crane gulped for breath. It was all so clear now! He could see dawning looks of understanding on the others' faces.

"Yes," came from the Invisible Robinhood, "and I also threw the second grenade, when the dragon attacked you and Jondra. I was the one sneaking around the plane, when Jondra appeared, after the radio was smashed.

"Yesterday, I threw the grenade when you and Pierre struggled together, killing the second dragon."

"*You* saved our lives?" Dr. Damon murmured. "Then you're our friend—"

"Is he?" Crane's face was suddenly grim. "It must have been you that spoiled Pierre's first shot, and later chased away the deer, Mr. Invisible Robinhood. *And you also smashed the plane's radio!* You, as much as Harlan, have wanted to keep us locked in this valley without outside communication. Why?"

The unseen man seemed to ponder for a moment, silently. Then his disembodied voice, ignoring the accusations, addressed the dazed, crestfallen Harlan.

"I've tracked you from the start, Paul Harlan. I knew you would reveal yourself—*Agent R-616!*"

Harlan started. "You mean you know—"

The Invisible Robinhood made an affirmative sound.

"Everything." He addressed the others. "This man is a quisling*—a member of the fifth column operating in North America!"

"Fifth column!" Dr. Damon gasped. "What do they want up here in this god-forsaken—"

"Your invisibility, of course," the answer came back sharply. "They got on the track of it when Pierre, delivering your first message, took time out for a few drinks. He slipped, mentioning the valley of invisibility. No one paid any attention except a fifth column spy. They're all over, with their ears and eyes open for everything.

"Their headquarters was informed, in Chicago, and a certain masked Commander "Z" met a certain agent R-616 in a cheap hotel room, to give him his instructions. When Jondra put an ad in the paper for a chemist, Agent R-616 answered. Paul Harlan is an expert chemist, in real life. But he is also a fifth columnist—working for them, not you!"

"Good Lord!" Dr. Damon shook his head dazedly. "I never dreamed—"

"How do you know all that, Invisible Robinhood?" Crane asked.

THEY could sense his peculiar smile. "I am silent as the wind, swift as the tiger. I am unseen, undetectible. I see all, know all, hear all. At any moment I may be at your elbow, any where!"

He chuckled. "At least, that was my publicity, during my campaign against crime, for the benefit of those who

* "Quisling"—the 1940 term for a traitor, a fifth columnist.—Ed.

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needed to fear me. As a matter of fact, I stumbled on this accidentally.

"Since the European war, I've been investigating fifth column activities, the greatest menace on this continent today. For a year I was on the trail. It wasn't an easy job.

"The fifth column has spawned and spread almost unhindered, like a malignant cancer. They are very clever, no quisling knowing more than one other quisling by name. The vast anonymous network has but one common basis — the undermining of the North American peoples. They vision the day when in one stunning upheaval, America the unconquerable will be fast in their grip.

"They have gained recruits—renegades to their country—from every walk of life, and by any and all means. Particularly appeal to ambition and dissatisfaction.

"Paul Harlan is a typical example. He is ambitious. The fifth column converts have more ambition per square head than any other group in the country. And the fifth column G.H.Q. lavishes promises faster than any blitzkrieg ever took objectives.

"That's what I'm up against—for I've vowed to smash the fifth column. The only way will be to reach the top men. I had laboriously tracked my way as high as Commander Z. But when he gave R-616 his instructions to get the secret of invisibility, I had to follow that branch trail.

"I was at Paul Harlan's elbow when he met Commander Z. I was at Paul Harlan's elbow when he stepped into the plane at the airport."

Crane had to laugh at Harlan's crushed air.

"You didn't have a chance at all, Harlan, in your doublecrossing—"

He broke off, lifting his head. They all heard it—a faint drone from the sky. A tiny plane sparkling high in the air, in the south. It rapidly enlarged into a two-motored cabin ship. It swooped, circling the valley.

"Harlan's fifth columnist friends!" Crane whirled to the scientist. "What's the way out of the valley by foot, that you and Pierre found? The sooner we leave, the better. We can pack enough food along to reach some town—"

Harlan was grinning. "The one trail out of the valley," he put in, "is at the other end. I saw it on Dr. Damon's map. There is also a clearing there, wide enough for a plane landing. I told my men to come down there!"

"We're cut off!" the scientist groaned. "There's no other way out!"

They watched helplessly as the plane zoomed down, landing five miles away in the clearing at that end of the valley.

"They'll be here soon, probably with sub-machine guns," Crane muttered. "Their job is to mow us down."

He automatically patted Jondra's shoulder as she crept into his arms. They all knew without saying that the fifth column revolutionists were more brutal in their methods than any in history. There was no escape, and no quarter from which to expect help.

CHAPTER VII

The Fifth Column

THE Invisible Robinhood's voice rang out.

"It isn't over yet. We have guns. Stand them off. Lock Harlan up in the cave."

His authoritative voice broke up the indecision of the others. They accepted his leadership instantly. Somehow, invisible though he was, there was an air of confidence and resourcefulness about him.

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Crane and Pierre shoved Harlan into the cave, after removing all guns, ammunition and grenades. The solid pine door was swung shut and barred from outside. Harlan would have no chance to aid his fellow quislings.

Then Crane, Dr. Damon and Pierre distributed themselves at separate points just behind the outjutting logs of the crude walls. They would not be easy targets in the shadow of the rock overhang. Jondra stood beside Crane, a rifle gripped in her hands with grim determination. Crane squeezed her shoulder.

"Be brave, Jondra," he whispered. "The Invisible Robinhood will have a trick or two up his sleeve, if the stories about him are at all true."

But for the present, he had simply done as they had—taken a strategic position. A rifle hung eerily at shoulder height, waiting for the adversary.

The enemy appeared within two hours, picking their way gingerly through the invisible forest. Harlan had evidently given them enough details of the valley and its strange unseen life to allow them planned action. They came directly toward the cave.

Crane's heart sank. Six of them, hard-looking men, trained by the fifth column for just this sort of bloody work. Each carried a rifle, a knapsack of grenades, and three of them carried the parts of a portable automatic gun. They wore metal helmets and dull-gray uniforms. They were as efficiently prepared for their mission as any spearhead unit of a mechanized army in the European war.

The fifth column did nothing by halves, in their subversive program to undermine the thus far adamant American hemisphere.

The party stopped five hundred yards away, out of range of any but superb marksmanship. One man raised a speaking tube to his mouth and yelled across.

"You have Paul Harlan prisoner?"

Sensing the Invisible Robinhood did not wish to reveal his presence, Crane cupped his lips and shouted back the affirmative.

"Give yourselves up!" came back. "You have no chance against us. If you surrender quietly, we promise you safe passage back. We do not want your lives, only the secret of invisibility!"

"A lie, of course," the Invisible Robinhood's whisper came. "The fifth column doesn't know what the word 'honor' is. If we surrender, we'll be shot down like dogs!"

Crane's voice was an enraged taunt. "Come and get us!"

The leader waved a hand instantly, as though knowing that would be the answer. The men scattered in a semicircle and began creeping within gun range. Rifles barked. Shots tore around them viciously.

CRANE shot six times, taking careful beads, and then cursed lividly. Not one of those clearly exposed men had dropped or even faltered.

"The invisible forest protects them," Jondra said. "They're running from invisible tree to invisible tree."

Crane ground his teeth at the irony. Imponderable light went through the trees, but not bullets. The raiders had a perfect protective medium. They crept closer steadily, firing slowly, waiting to get within effective range.

Their tactics were mercilessly efficient. At three hundred yards, three men scurried together, and began hastily assembling their machine gun. The other three poured a withering rifle barrage toward the cave, to disconcert the defenders' aim.

The gun was set up in seconds. Two

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men dashed away and the third threw himself full length behind the gun. In a moment its raking fire began systematically to cover every inch of the defended area.

Flinging Jondra flat on the ground behind the log wall, Crane himself shrank back. Solid sheets of lead were prying into every nook and corner. Splinters of wood flew viciously.

"What can we do?" came Dr. Damon's wail from the other side. "We can't fire a shot back!"

Crane knew there was one thing to try. Waiting till the swinging muzzle had arced away from him, he desperately ran out, hurling a grenade. It fell far short, digging a uselesss pit. The horrible chatter of the automatic weapon went on unabated, filling the valley with a rattling thunder.

As though his grenade had been the signal, the other five invaders ran forward boldly, grenades in their hands. In a few seconds, within range, they would bomb down the log walls.

"We've got to do something, Invisible Robinhood!" Crane shouted. "For God's sake, think of something! We'll be murdered where we stand—"

Crane suddenly realized he was talking to himself. The spot where the invisible man had stood seemed no different except for one thing—there was no rifle hanging mysteriously without support.

"Damn him!" Crane raged. "He's deserted us! I knew I shouldn't have trusted him—"

His voice was drowned out by a furious roar. The grenades! Then already the enemy were within range!

Crane waited for the log walls to crash around their ears, leaving them defenseless.

Instead, the roar was followed by the familiar crackling of a splintered tree. Then a ground-shaking thump, as its invisible bulk smashed down and measured its length on the ground.

Another roar. Again a tree gave its death wail and sought its grave.

Roar!—Crash!

Roar!—Crash!

Crane looked out. The five advancing attackers had halted in their tracks, grenades unthrown. They looked about frightened, as the invisible forest seemed to have gone mad, threatening to crush them with hundred-foot falling juggernauts.

HUGH CRANE let out a whoop of of joy. The enemy couldn't know that an invisible man was among them, tossing grenades at trees and bringing them down. It was as though a giant were uprooting them as clubs and beating the ground to blindly obliterate the invaders.

So it must have seemed to the thoroughly astounded fifth columnists. They fled back, like scared rabbits. They had been ready for anything, but not trees falling like leaves.

The man at the machine gun courageously stuck to his post, until invisible branches of a crashing tree knocked his weapon twenty feet through the air, and himself into a thicket of invisible brambles.

They retreated, but not in panic. Well trained, even in the face of a staggering surprise, they unhitched the machine gun and left at a dog-trot. One man ran smack into an invisible tree, knocking himself out. Two others put their arms under his shoulders and dragged him along. One man covered the rear at a slower pace, glancing back as often as he could, rifle ready.

Crane restrained himself from ordering a counter-attack. They were still a formidable force, in their well-organized retreat. Let them go. Crane contented himself with taking a careful

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bead, estimating the invisible trees by their winding path, and seeing one man jerk and clutch his arm. They would take back one wound, as well as their bruises from the falling trees.

"Well, how was that?"

Crane started. The Invisible Robinhood's voice had spoken beside his ear.

"Great!" Crane commended. "You saved the day! But why not follow them now? You could pick them off one by one—"

"No. If I tried that, they would radio to the plane. They are always in radio contact. The men at the plane—perhaps three or four men left on guard—would then know of an invisible man. They'd plan against me.

"I've seen enough of fifth column methods to know it's a mistake to underestimate them. They're not brainless, blundering gangsters. They're intelligent, clever, efficient to the highest degree."

His voice became low, thoughtful.

"We have a tough fight ahead of us—to escape them. They'll come back next with light field guns, perhaps, hurling shells from a mile or two back."

"Good Lord!" shuddered Dr. Damon. "Just like the war in Europe—machines against men. We haven't a ghost of a chance of holding out!"

A pair of invisible fingers snapped.

"We have one good chance. Their whole mission is to bring back the secret of invisibility. Suppose we spill all the blood samples, and then let them know that Harlan will be killed by us.

"They might be willing to bargain for his life, since they would lose time starting at scratch again. One of the fifth column's main creeds is speed, speed. Let's talk to Harlan."

"Spill the samples—no!" Dr. Daman almost shouted it. "I won't allow it. I—"

Crane could feel the invisible man's cold stare at the scientist.

"Have you thought of invisible fifth columnists, Dr. Damon? They would have a noose around America before we could say mechanized unit! *They must not get that secret!*"

DR. DAMON gasped. "Invisible fifth columnists!" He made no further objections.

Pierre swung open the barred door.

"Come out, Harlan," Crane commanded. "We want to talk to you."

There was no answer. Crane repeated his words, then stepped in impatiently.

"If I have to drag you out, like a stubborn child—"

His voice ground to a startled halt.

The interior of the cave-space was empty! The others crowded in, gaping. Harlan was simply not there, only his clothing piled in a heap.

"How could he have escaped?" Crane said dazedly. "Through solid log walls and a barred door?"

Jondra screamed. "That shadow at the door—"

They whirled. Something shadowy and vague was plunging through the doorway. It was in the shape of a man.

"Harlan!"

Crane leaped, but something shouldered him aside at the door. The Invisible Robinhood had leaped first, and was chasing the escaping man.

Running outside, the rest saw only a translucent silhouette racing away into the forest, pursued by something they could not see at all.

Five minutes later the Invisible Robinhood's voice sounded before them, panting.

"Got away. Wasn't quite invisible, but in the sunlight it was like keeping your eye on a flitting shadow. I lost him."

"He injected some of the blood solu-

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tion into his veins!" Dr. Damon cried. "I should have known he'd try it. The invisibility hormone is so powerful it works within an hour. He'll be completely invisible soon, and stay that way till the dose wears off—probably twenty-four hours."

"An invisible man against us!" Jondra whispered.

Crane looked at the Invisible Robinhood—or the spot he occupied.

"That complicates matters. Harlan, invisible, can come sneaking back and—"

He didn't finish the sentence. It would sound too horrible to say it. But suddenly he did say it, in altered form.

"Why not sneak to their camp and murder *them* in their sleep?" he demanded. "Every minute that goes by endangers us. And all America! You're invisible. They can't touch you. Take a gun and shoot them down like they would have shot us down.

"I know it won't be an easy thing to do. Any decent man's soul revolts at being a cowardly assassin. But you've got to, Robinhood. It's the only way!"

The others looked at each other, shuddering. It was a stark, merciless suggestion. The height, perhaps, of sheer deliberate murder. But the stakes were equally in proportion.

There was silence from the Invisible Robinhood for a long moment. Then a deep, grim sigh.

"Give me a rifle and twelve bullets," he said.

A moment later he was gone, as unseen and silent as the wind.

CHAPTER VIII

Under Fire

CRANE said little to Jondra as they waited, his arm across her shoulder. Dr. Damon seemed to find the ground interesting. Pierre stared out over the invisible forest, his black eyes enigmatic as always.

They strained their ears to hear shots. The shots that would announce human beings murdered without a chance, by an invisible assassin. It was a grim, soul-searing game that was being played out in a sunken valley, far north of the teeming cities of America.

Crane started. A twig had crackled, somewhere out at the fringe of the invisible forest. He jumped up. Their invisible friend was returning.

"Robinhood? You—"

A shot rang out. The bullet whistled past Crane's ear and thunked into the logs behind.

Jondra screamed. "Look there—a gun pointing at us!"

Two hundred feet ahead, a gun hung in the air.

"Harlan!" groaned Dr. Damon. "He's invisible now and he'll kill us!"

Another shot split the air, as they all leaped for the cave door. Harlan, a poor shot, had missed again. But if he pumped shots at their massed group, entering the doorway, he couldn't fail to get one or two. Then he would stalk them inside, shoot them down one by one . . .

Even as he ducked and whirled, Crane saw what happened. Something wrenched the gun from Harlan's hands. It swung around as a club. It whacked against an invisible tree, the stock shattering. For a moment it hung, then began moving toward them, at the pace of a man walking.

The battle of the invisible men had been short.

"Did you get him, Robinhood?" Crane queried eagerly.

"No." The bodiless voice was weary, defeated. "I tried to club him, but he slipped away. He's completely invis-

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ible now. And that's why I failed in everything . . ."

"Failed? You didn't get the other men?"

Again a weary, "No."

"Everything seemed perfect," the voice went on. "The men were all outside the plane—ten of them altogether. Creeping close, I shot one." He seemed to shudder a little.

"But when I aimed for the second, a shot rang back. Harlan had been expecting me. Guessing my position by the hang of the visible rifle, he could get me eventually, poor shot though he is. I couldn't get him. He was behind the plane.

"There was only one thing to do. I had to drop my giveaway—the rifle—and leave. Still, I hung around a few minutes, debating some other plan. For instance, using a grenade, and blasting plane and all apart.

"Suddenly, it came to me like a blow. Harlan now knew I was there. Therefore he would run to this camp and murder you, not having me to fear. He could do his job much quicker than I could do mine, and still have time to return and rescue whatever men remained. That's how the fifth columnists figure those things—in plain, cold, emotionless figures.

"I guess I came back just in time, running all the way. Harlan's first shot told me where he was. I ran to him—and you know the rest."

Crane pondered. "Invisible man against invisible man! No matter what you do, he can duplicate it. And Harlan has the advantage. He has more men and more arms. Good Lord, what can *we* do?"

It was not stalemate. It was certain victory for the enemy.

DUSK came, as the sun slowly sank. Darkness settled over the valley of invisibility and terror. And menace.

"Suppose they attack at night?" Jondra breathed.

"I doubt it," the Invisible Robinhood said. "Darkness gives us more advantage than they, on the defensive. All blitzkrieg tactics take full advantage of the best, not the worst of conditions. However, we'll take precautions. I'll stand guard outside. Crane, you sleep at the door. The rest back in the cave."

The night hours wore away. Crane awoke from the doze he had achieved, disturbed by some sound in the forest's night quiet. The stealthy pad of feet! Closer they came, silently shrieking of threat.

Where was the Invisible Robinhood? Why wasn't he on the job? Had he left them exposed to throat-slitting by the invisible Harlan?

Quivering at the frightful thought, Crane raised his rifle. He felt blind and helpless, as so often before. How could he fight an unseen presence who could come from any side, strike at any unannounced moment?

Was a sharp knife even at that moment sweeping toward his unprotected back?

The next sound Crane heard was the most welcome in the world. It was a sniff. An animal sniff, followed by the low growl of an invisible bear, snooping around the camp for tidbits of food, most likely.

Crane fumbled for a piece of the deer meat and tossed it out.

"Here you are, old top," he whispered. "I'm glad it's you rather than a certain invisible snake. Hope all your children are visible. Now scram."

A pleased grunt sounded, and the slice of meat floated off into the starlit night.

Crane didn't doze any more. Dawn was breaking. A new day was here—the day that would tell the story, one

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way or another.

A hand gripped his shoulder.

"I'm back, Crane."

"Robinhood! Where were you? Damn you, man, do you realize you left us at the mercy of Harlan, if he had come?"

"I knew he wouldn't," the unseen man said calmly. "He was too busy guarding his own camp. Besides, it's chilly at night. Don't forget, he has to run around naked. His clothes are still visible.

"I went to their camp. I had grenades along. I thought of blowing the plane up, with them all inside. But only four were in. The rest were elsewhere, in some cliff cave I'd have to search for all night. If I did eliminate the four, Harlan would again have raced here and bombed this camp to smithereens. Any way I looked at it, they would come out ahead."

His voice changed to bafflement.

"I've been thinking all night, hoping to figure out some other plan. We must try something soon, now that day is here—"

"For Pete's sake!" Crane exclaimed, thumping his head with his knuckles. "What am I waiting for? If Harlan could become invisible, why can't I? Two invisible men against one and we can get him!"

HE was already ducking into the cave, striding for the work bench at the rear and its bottles and cans of invisible blood. He picked up a flask, apparently empty, but heavy with its unseen contents.

Pulling out the stopper, Crane filled a hypodermic lying nearby. Eagerly he brought the needle close to his left arm's largest vein, for injection.

A hand knocked the hypodermic away, shattering it on the ground.

Dr. Damon had watched, rubbing his eyes, and then bounded from his bunk.

"You fool!" he barked. "That stuff is poison. I would have suggested it yesterday, except for that. Any animal blood is poison in a human being's veins, except certain types of anthropoid blood. Harlan will be dead before this day is over!"

"Did he *know* that?" Crane gasped.

The scientist nodded.

"The fifth columnists are fanatics," the Invisible Robinhood remarked. "Harlan sacrificed his life for the cause."

The words seemed to echo in the cave.

Crane picked up another hypodermic, grimly.

"Two invisible men against one, and we have a chance—"

Dr. Damon looked at him, but said nothing. The Invisible Robinhood made no move to interfere. They would have to stand aside now, and watch deliberate suicide.

With a tightening of his lips, Crane prepared to plunge the needle home. Again it was knocked out of his hands.

"I can't let you!" Jondra sobbed. "Isn't there anything else we can do?"

She was facing the spot at which the Invisible Robinhood stood, bitterly.

"In smashing the fifth column, Mr. Robinhood, you're smashing us just as ruthlessly. You started all this—by not exposing Harlan at the beginning. You played the game your way, and we suffer as pawns. There's probably no room for emotion—love, for instance—in your career of giant-killing. You're just a cold, feelingless human robot—"

The tirade ended in a choke, as the girl buried her head against Crane's chest.

Love! That was a queer thing to bring up in this valley of hate and death and menace.

An aura of sudden sadness radiated

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from the unseen man. Crane could feel it. Hard he might be at times, striving for his goals at any cost, but beneath it he was human. And somewhere, something had seared his soul—but still left him human.

There was the merest murmur.

"Love? I loved a girl once. She is like you, fair, sweet . . ."

The voice trailed away. Then it spoke softly again.

"Wait here. I'll investigate the enemy's activity. If anything else can be done—"

He was gone.

HIS voice was still soft when he returned, an hour later. Soft but grim.

"They've set up three field guns, about two miles back. Judging by their positions, and the stacks of ammunition beside them, they're ready to bombard this entire end of the valley. Raze it flat!"

Broooommmm!

The dull thump sounded, followed a few seconds later by a ground-shaking roar. A quarter-mile to the left of them, where the shell landed, a shower of dirt sprayed into the air. With it, unseen, had gone a shredding of the valley's shadow-life.

A second shell landed fifty feet nearer. A third still nearer, bringing down on them a fine stinging hail. The artillerists were finding the range rapidly.

"They'll systematically sweep every inch of our end of the valley," the Invisible Robinhood said, still softly. "Everything will go—forest, cave, animals, dragons—"

"Dragons!"

It was Pierre's voice, in a deadly rage.

"They kill dragon! Fear dragon! But I will kill *them!* I, Pierre, will lead my dragons—"

He lapsed into rapid French, shaking his fist in the direction of the thumping guns. The others watched in astonishment.

"Pierre!" Crane snapped. "Keep your head, now of all times. We need every man—"

He stopped, gasping. Pierre was stripping off his clothes. The garments dropped. The body exposed was translucent. Direct rays of the sun stabbed through and through, outlining the bones. And rapidly, even the skeleton was fading into the unseen background of air, as the hormone of invisibility bleached the guide beyond the color-spectrum faster than any dye had ever worked.

"Pierre!" Dr. Damon cried. "You took a dose of the blood. You'll die!"

Pierre does not die. Pierre will lead his dragons—"

With a wild shout, the wraithlike form stalked toward the forest.

"Mad! Utterly mad!" Dr. Damon whispered. "I suspected it all along, in the previous six months. The thought of the invisible dragons preyed on his mind."

Crane jumped to catch Pierre, but an invisible hand stayed him.

"Let him go. Time's short. We have to dodge these shells. We can't run forward openly, for they'll be waiting for us. But we can move along the cliff-edges, in comparative safety, ahead of the barrage."

"Suppose we survive the bombardment, by a miracle?" Crane said hopelessly. "What then?"

"Pierre is leading the dragons!" the Invisible Robinhood breathed.

Crane started. Had the Invisible Robinhood gone mad too? But there was little time to speculate. An invisible hand, covered with fine wire mesh, grasped his, pulling him away.

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Jondra had Crane's other hand, and her father brought up the rear.

They were to play a new game—dodging shells.

CHAPTER IX

Blood Barrage

CRANE was never quite clear how they escaped the holocaust of bombardment. With the precision of army artillery, the field guns methodically lobbed their shells back and forth across the narrow end of the valley. Starting at the cliff-face, the barrage worked inward.

The tenth shot struck the cave home, scattering logs in all directions. The four were driven forestward, to keep ahead of the destruction. Eventually, they would stumble into the arms of the enemy.

"What plan have you?" Crane yelled above the terrific rumble of sound banging between the cliffs. "Why didn't you take the last chance—letting me become invisible? What chance is there now?"

But no answer came from the man whose unseen hand pulled them forward.

Crane noticed suddenly that they were working their way toward their own wrecked plane. Had the Invisible Robinhood forgotten that it was useless for flight? Crane tried to jerk away. Why let this madman lead them to certain destruction?

"You fool, stay with me!" came back the fierce retort. "Now's our chance!"

He was tugging them toward the plane. The barrage had swung toward the other cliff-face, temporarily. They were safe for a few minutes from flying steel splinters and crashing trees.

"Quick!" commanded the Invisible Robinhood. "Run your gas out on the ground. But not the reserve tank. Start your engine and let it run on the reserve—at high speed."

Crane complied, shaking his head in angry bewilderment.

The fuel poured out, soaking the plane and all the surrounding ground with its grass and bushes. The motor coughed, but started willingly enough, fed by the reserve tank. Crane set the throttle at half-speed, just at the point where the whole ship trembled and sought to move. A little more and it would trundle forward, to ram into trees with its controls wrecked.

"Now run!" the invisible man yelled. "Run as fast as you can—"

And he insanely led the way directly through the barrage line!

The raking shells began to pound nearer and nearer, like a returning pendulum. Trees crashed behind them, clutching at them with whipping branches. Flying splinters thudded viciously against invisible tree boles.

Crane felt a nudge in the flesh of his left arm, and the warm stickiness of blood, but raced on. He was half carrying Jondra. An invisible arm was pulling Dr. Damon along faster than his age could propel his muscles.

The universe seemed falling about their ears. But they made it.

The thumping barrage swung away on its ordered course. It neared, now, the spot where the plane lay.

PANTING, they stopped and watched as a livid sheet of flame sprang from the spilled gasoline. Trails of fire promptly cracked into the air, following the branches of invisible trees. Billows of smoke swirled into the sky.

In seconds, the first tentative flames had become a roaring forest fire, fanned by the propellor blasts of air. The next shell sent the plane into oblivion.

And it scattered firebrands.

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"It worked!" The Invisible Robinhood's shout was a cry of triumph.

The fire became a blazing inferno. Rapidly treetops touched off from one to the next. A line of flame strung itself across the valley from cliff to cliff. Then, like an enraged bull, it charged forward toward the center of the valley.

Demon fire had joined the battle in the valley of invisibility!

It was a strange sight. The flames seemed to spring out from nowhere, burning on invisible fuel. Branches and trees became visible, under the scorching death, but again vanished in the consuming blaze.

Crane hardly realized he had been screeching like a maniac for some time.

"I get it!" he yelled above the din. "Jondra! Dr. Damon! We're safe here, where the barrage blew the forest to bits. No fuel for the fire. But the flames will sweep through all the rest of the valley. Harlan and his gang can't blitzkrieg a fire away. They're sunk!"

His voice changed just as suddenly. "But wait—suppose they simply turn the field guns and blast clear their end, before the fire comes. Then they're saved too." He groaned. "We're still no better off!"

"Pierre is leading the dragons!" the Invisible Robinhood said enigmatically. In more practical tones, he added, "The valley is narrow. The fire will drive all animals before it, toward the enemy's camp. Including the dragons. Have you ever seen what a herd of elephants do on a stampede?"

Jondra shuddered. "The men will be trampled to death!"

THEIR JUBILANCE over victory was subdued by the thought of what must be happening on the other side of that pitiless, searing, charging wall of flame.

The field guns stopped thumping abruptly. Crane could picture the gunners staring at the oncoming wave of fire in horror. Then screaming and running. No "strategic retreat" this time. Just a blind, panic-stricken flight.

No safety in their plane, with its gasoline but fuel to feed the enveloping flames. No time to take off. They could only stumble hopelessly on, to the very end of the valley. They would turn around then, with their backs to the cliff, eyes horror-struck at their doom. They would tear at each other in the attempt to struggle up the one scalable path out of the valley.

BUT before this would come the waves of fleeing animals. The animals would dash themselves against the cliffs, making them slippery with blood. The monstrous dragons would thunder up, snorting, bellowing, trampling. Their mighty feet, as they raced up and down seeking escape, would crush all the lesser animals. Including man.

It would be a sight no one would want to see.

The four were silent, waiting. In a short hour, the whole valley had gone up in smoke. Walls of smoke had mercifully screened from their eyes any glimpse of the happenings there. The steady crackle had camouflaged all sounds.

The flames died, then. The valley lay a smouldering ruin.

"Every living thing is wiped out!" Crane grunted. "This is the valley of death!"

"Not quite—listen!"

They heard the rackling of a ponderous body through the dying embers ahead. Through the pall came limping a smoke-silhouetted dragon. Crane gripped a grenade but then relaxed. The beast, staggering and groaning,

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had no interest in them. It sought a cool spot. Easing its bulk down in the unburned section, it licked its wounds.

"Some of the animals escaped," the Invisible Robinhood mused. "Perhaps the fleetest deer, and a few of the armor-plated dragons. Undoubtedly some of the vegetation here and there, in niches. The cycle could start again . . ."

His voice trailed away thoughtfully.

CHAPTER X

"The Secret Must Remain a Secret!"

THEY returned to what had been the cave home. Most of it was a gaping ruin, but the back portion was comparatively unscathed. Food supplies remained, and a dozen sealed cans of blood.

Dr. Damon picked them up eagerly.

"I thought they would all be destroyed. I'll take these back. I'll still announce to the science world the great discovery of invisibility!"

His voice changed to a bark.

"Here—stop that!"

Unseen hands were stamping a rifle butt down on the cans, splitting them open. The invisible fluid vanished into the dirt. Dr. Damon attempted to wrench the rifle away. A hand that could not be seen roughly pushed him away.

Crane clutched at an arm whose position he guessed.

"Listen, Robinhood! Just—"

A fist thudded against his chest, breaking his hold. He almost reeled back against the wall.

For a moment, loud breathing sounded from the invisible man, as though he were a jungle animal over a kill.

"Back!" he grated. "Stay back, or I'll—"

Suddenly his voice changed, to its usual softness.

"I'm sorry. But I must do this. The secret of invisibility must remain in this valley!"

Crane's thoughts clicked. The last bits of the puzzle slipped into place.

"I see!" he murmured. "That's why you didn't reveal yourself to us right away. You played a lone game. You smashed the radio, so the outside world could not be told of this.

"You chased the deer because you didn't want Dr. Damon to get blood samples. You wanted neither the fifth column to get the secret, nor Dr. Damon. Nor anybody—except yourself! But what right have you, Robinhood, to deny Dr. Damon, a scientist, his discovery?"

The Invisible Robinhood's voice came back in deadly earnest.

"No one must have the secret of invisibility—ever! I discovered it by accident, by a physical principle rather than through a hormone. I've not misused it. Many others would do good with it, as I have.

But once it got into the wrong hands—chaos! The world would be a madhouse. Invisible deeds of crime! Invisible spies! Invisible armies! Think of those things.

"I know you're an altruist, Dr. Damon. You probably think of good uses for invisibility—as in crushing crime. But you can't quite know, as I do, what power it gives a person. You can't quite know that you're tampering with dynamite that can blast the world!

"I hope you see my viewpoint. That if it's within my power to prevent anyone else from having my secret, I must do so!"

Jondra spoke up firmly. "It's cold, ruthless reasoning. But it's plain logic!"

The two men glared, still angered,

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but they made no move as the rifle butt resumed cracking open the cans, spilling the last of the blood samples into the ground.

"There!" It was a deep sigh from the unseen man. The sigh of one who has accomplished a vital mission.

An echoing sigh came from Dr. Damon. His shoulders sagged. He turned away without a word, brokenly.

CRANE could think of no way of consoling a man who had just seen the discovery of a century trickling into oblivion. Nor could he think of any way of denying that the Invisible Robinhood had done right.

He turned to Jondra. He had something to say to her, anyway.

DAWN STRETCHED its rosy fingers across a seared, blackened valley. The four people—one invisible—picked their way to the other end. The fifth columnists' plane, in its clearing, had freakishly remained unburned, its fuel untouched. The saboteurs had not thought that miracle would happen, or they would have huddled in the ship.

Instead, they had fled. All that remained of them now was scattered somewhere in the black strewing of scorched bones littering the cliff-face. Crane shuddered, at thought of what terror had reigned here the day before.

"Look!"

Jondra's hand pointed halfway up the cliff-face, along the steep path that led out of the valley. Pierre's body hung there, against an outjutting stone—visible once again in death. Skin half black, the flames had just reached Pierre. One arm was stiffly outstretched, as if he had been beckoning. The expression on his face was strangely at peace.

The Invisible Robinhood spoke solemnly.

"Have you guessed about Pierre? When he drank too much whiskey that time, delivering Dr. Damon's letter, he babbled into the ears of a fifth column spy, as I mentioned. The spy took all the conversation down, in a report to Commander Z. I saw the verbatim wording.

"In one place, Pierre had said, in drunken French:

"I just dare the blitzkriegers of Europe to attack our shores! I will lead the invisible dragons out of the valley. They will frighten the enemy. They will stamp the enemy flat. Yes I, Pierre, will save my country from the enemy, for I will lead the invisible dragons against them!' "

The invisible man's voice rose a note.

"I salute you, Pierre! In your own way, you were ready to defend your country and continent against invasion, even if you were mad in the thought. And you *did* lead the dragons . . ."

CRANE WAS not surprised when the Invisible Robinhood, a while later, made no move to enter the plane.

"I'm staying. Perhaps two or three of the dragons are alive yet. I must hunt them down. And any others of the Unseen Life. Then I must destroy every last vintage of the Unseen Vegetation, with burning gasoline.

"Leave with me, besides food, a rifle, ammunition, the grenades, and a tin of gasoline. Invisibility is a menace. When I leave, this valley will be barren of life. After that"—he paused—"there are many things to do."

Jondra felt for his arm. "You said before that you loved a girl, and that she's still alive. You're wrong in denying yourself—and her—that love, no matter what tasks you set yourself!"

A LOW, almost harsh chuckle sounded. "Look!"

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A switch snapped. With startling abruptness, Crane and Jondra saw a tall, lithe young man before them. He was completely sheathed in what looked like fine chain-mail. The gauntleted hands reached up to unfasten the helmetlike hood. Hugh Crane and Jondra Damon gasped in unison.

The face revealed was hideous beyond belief. Great burn-scars obliterated what had once been strong, handsome features. There was little of nose or hair. The lips and jaws were a network of white lines where surgical thread had sewed mangled flesh together. The mouth still looked like an unhealed wound. Only purple folds of lumpy scar tissue remained.

Jondra and Crane stared at this dreadful, once-handsome caricature of a man with horror-stricken eyes.

"I discovered my method of invisibility in a laboratory," said the Invisible Robinhood. "There was an explosion—"

"Oh, you poor fellow!" Jondra cried and burst into tears.

Again there was a click, and the Invisible Robinhood vanished from their sight.

THEY TOOK off a little later in Crane's airplane, which had been quickly but efficiently repaired. Three people were in that plane, leaving forever behind them a land which time had truly forgotten—Hugh Crane, Jondra Damon and her scientist father, bitter lines about his mouth in the knowledge that the greatest discovery of all time had come to naught.

Crane looked down. He could see nothing of an invisible man stalking invisible beasts. Somehow, it had all been a horrible dream. Not the least tragic had been that poignant moment when the Invisible Robinhood had figuratively unmasked himself, a splendid young man whose caricature of a face would curse him through all his days.

Curse him, and deny him the fruits of a happy life. But raw courage and high achievement would be his, and Crane knew in his heart that when ugly menace stalked the highways of crime, the Invisible Robinhood would somehow be on hand, ever on the alert against men who would use the marvels of science for their own vicious purposes . . .

Hugh Crane turned to Jondra. Thank heaven, she at least had come out of this all unscathed. And she was entirely visible. In fact, come to think of it, she was a most attractive-looking young lady.

Jondra, with a woman's intuition, read the message in Crane's gray eyes.

Her answering smile was the most visible thing Crane had ever seen.

« « EARLY EXPLORERS » »

WHO discovered America? For centuries historians have answered this question without difficulty. It has been generally conceded that Lief Ericson, the adventurous Norseman, was the first to set foot on the North American continent, and, that Columbus, the Genoese sailor, followed him several centuries later. But in the light of recent developments in South America it begins to look as if neither of these is the true discoverer of this continent.

For, on the outskirts of Rio de Janerio, curious stone tablets have been unearthed by native archeologists. Most curious fact in regard to these stone tablets is that the symbols carved on them are in the *language of the ancient Phoenicians!* History had no record of this race ever venturing toward that section of the world. In fact it had been taken for granted that the Phoenicians were a somewhat cautious race, content to trade safely and unexcitingly in the Mediterranean. But this idea falls to pieces when we consider their inscriptions, thousands of miles from their homes, in South America. If the Phoenicians were the first discoverers of America, history needs a good deal of rewriting.

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3 EYES In The Dark

BY DON WILCOX

Nort bore his Martian slavery patiently and dreamed of the day when "Three Eyes" would rescue mankind....

LAGGAMON and Etang, the two Rabs, lay on their blankets beside the campfire. Nort, their slave, had prepared hot water for their baths, but they would not bathe. The mountain air was too chilly. Besides, they were already getting sleepy.

Nort, the Venortian slave, came trudging past them with his arms full of firewood.

Laggamon, nudging his companion, gave a swift swing of his muscular right arm that held a long woven black whip. The end of the blacksnake lashed the slave's ankles. Nort stumbled and fell, face down, into the heap of firewood.

"Pick it up, you wretch!" Laggamon shouted. "What's the matter? Can't you walk straight?"

"He must be drunk," Etang snorted. "Got intoxicated on that soup he gave us for supper."

The two Rabs made ready for bed. The Venortian slave shook the sand from their blankets and made up their beds in the open rear end of the truck. Then he went back to his firewood.

"Three fires every night," Etang muttered. "Damned if Venortians aren't the most superstitious people that we ever chased off a plantet."

"And how they hang on to their silly customs is a fright. Even invent new ones. Did you hear the latest that's making the rounds?"

"Three eyes in the dark?"

"That's it. One slave'll say to another, 'Have you seen three eyes in the dark?' And maybe the second slave will say 'yes', or maybe he'll give a blank stare—depending on how superstitious he is."

"There's something back of it," Etange grunted. "There's something about the number three. Look how he lays out those fires—in a triangle. It's always been the same, every season we take him out on these surveying trips. I'll swear if we were in a treeless desert, or above the timber line, he'd rustle enough wood to make three fires. He claims one's for cooking, one's for warmth, and one's for our Rab gods," and Etang expressed his contempt by spitting. "There's still too much Venortian about Nort for him to build a fire to *our* gods. If his people ever should

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Reverently Nort knelt before the wonderful vision of "Three Eyes."

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come back, he and a lot of other slaves might turn into something beside faithful, plodding servants."

"Pfff!" said Laggamon.

"Don't you believe it?"

"They'll never come back. Only a few thousand got away in third-rate space ships—and that was long ago—before our time. Even this fellow Nort was no more than a boy, so I've heard him say. And look how the seasons have tamed him. Now he's nothing but a harmless old man. Give him a few lashes with the blacksnake every day and he's as good a slave as any Rab could want."

With that Laggamon turned over and went to sleep. Etang watched the three flickering fires for several minutes, studied the slow, patient, mysterious figure of Nort the slave sitting by one of the fires patching his ragged garments.

"Bring me a drink of water, Nort," said Etang. When the slave came with the cup of water, the Rab eyed the weatherbeaten old face closely. "Have you seen three eyes in the dark?"

Not a flicker of change crossed the plodding old slave's countenance. "I do not understand."

"All right. Get yourself to bed, Harmless. We'll have a hard day tomorrow. I don't want you lagging with that supply cart."

"Master Etang," Nort spoke in his even, unemotional voice, "may I have a little salve from the medicine box?"

"What for?"

"For the lashes on my back."

"You and your lashes! You'll get over them. You always do. Get to bed, before I give you some more."

THE succeeding days took the little party of three higher into the sand-blown mountains. Nort, who had borne his burdens of slavery for countless seasons, grew heavy at heart. The little steel supply cart that he hauled around at the beck and call of the two surveyors was light compared with the invisible load he carried.

It hurt Nort to see what had happened to this fine land. He had visited it when he was a boy. Then it had been irrigated from the mountain streams. That was how the Venortians had made it useful. Now it was a waste of mountainous desert. That was what the Rabs had done to it. They had not farmed it, they had come in with their gigantic machines and literally *mined* it.

Evening morning Nort saw the dull pink, arid sky. No promise of rain, only the promise of floating dust, wasted soil.

Every sleepless night Nort huddled by his fire, watching, the fine sand sift into the flame. Sand got in his eyebrows and clung to the deep lines that striped his face. Sand scoured his old memories bright.

How well he remembered the slaughter. It had come when he was only a youth. The Rabs had pounced down from the skies without warning. Their fighting ships with the sleek metallic lines had skimmed the surface of the planet, dragging sickles of death after them.

Nort remembered it as if it were yesterday. One can't witness the cold-blooded killing of one's parents and forget it in the same century of seasons.

The few, the fortunate few, had crowded into the available Venortian space ships and taken off swiftly. The remaining Venortians, enslaved, would never cease to whisper of that dramatic escape of the ships. Those fortunate few had escaped with the promise that some day they would come back, to rescue the others.

"The mythical rescue!" That was what the cruel and mighty Rabs called

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it. That was their joke, their favorite taunt to the Venortians they had enslaved.

The Venortians had been crushed into slavery swiftly. For many seasons the killing of slaves had been rampant. But after a time every living Venortian suppressed his rebel spirit and *pretended* patient obedience. Pretense was the price of living—waiting—hoping.

In rapid succession came the Rabs' crimes against the planet itself. All those natural resources, given by the gods for man's use, were ravaged and squandered. Lands that had been hundreds of thousands of seasons in the making was laid waste in a few seasons of helter-skelter management.

And now, each day, the realization filled Nort with such bitterness and hatred as he had never known before. This mountain trek gave him a more poignant perspective on man's crimes against the gods, and saturated him with acid hatred against the arrogant men who took relish in such crimes.

Then, one sleepless night while the weird winds whistled and the sands blew into the flames of his three fires, Nort saw the three eyes in the dark.

THE two Rabs were sound asleep. So far as Nort knew, there was no other living person within miles, other than Laggamon, Etang, and himself. The nearest Rab outpost was at least a quarter of a day's journey down the valley, at the lower end of the long winding irrigation pipe line that the Venortians themselves had built many generations ago.

And the nearest city was a day's journey beyond that.

Nor were these mountain wastes frequented by wild beasts. Animal life had migrated down the valley with the coming of the sands, and most of it had been exterminated.

But even if there had been beasts, Nort would not have thought of them now. Those three eyes that shone out of the blackness of night were no freak of biological nature. They were not really *eyes*. They were three glittering jewels, flashing back the light of Nort's campfires.

Nort saw them, coming out of the blackness, a little to one side of a withered brown pine tree that sang mournfully in the wind. He saw them coming closer, a triangle of flashing jeweled eyes; he brushed the sand from his eyelashes; he rose slowly. The advance of the three eyes stopped.

With a quick reassuring glance at his two masters, sound asleep in the truck, he ran to his tool cart, grasped a hand-ball blaster. This in case of unexpected danger. But Nort didn't really anticipate danger. Unless someone was using the ancient Venortian symbol of hope in mockery—

Nort advanced toward the old dead pine tree cautiously. It was more than three dots of light, hanging in the air in triangular formation. It was a black-hooded, black-cloaked figure. A slight motion of a black-gloved hand invited Nort to come.

Pressing one hand against the pocket that contained the hand-ball explosive, Nort came forward, every cell of his body tingling.

Within eight paces he stopped. By now the three "eyes" had become three ornaments, one at each shoulder, the third upon the belt buckle that clasped at the figure's waist.

As for the figure itself, it stood less tall than Nort, it's hood was a full-blown creation, its flowing cape draped a pair of shoulders that were narrow, while the black covering of the graceful body and limbs were close-fitting. Nort knew at once that this was a girl.

"I am Nort, a Venortian slave," he

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introduced himself with a courtesy reminiscent of pre-conquered days, though his poise was marked by a certain breathlessness that he couldn't prevent.

Slowly the girl removed the black hood from her face and head, revealing a countenance that was at once intent and indescribably beautiful. Even by the dim light of the waning campfires, her eyes struck Nort as having a penetrating quality unlike any eyes that had ever looked upon him before.

THE girl's gloved hand made a slight gesture toward her hair, which began to blow in loose waves the moment her hood was removed. Then she spoke, in a voice that seemed to still the winds—and her language was Venortian, the language forbidden by the Rabs!

"I am known as Three Eyes in the Dark. Have you ever seen me before?"

"No."

"I have seen so many in the past season that I no longer remember them all. But I hope to see everyone before the time—"

She hesitated, as if in danger of speaking too hastily. She looked toward the camp fires, the bright steel tool cart, the big Rab-made truck.

"You have come from one of the cities down in the valley, I presume," she spoke inquiringly.

"Yes, a day's ride beyond the old power plant down this trail." The eagerness in Nort's voice betrayed his thrill at speaking his native language again. Never except in the most guarded moments had he dared to say such words even to himself. "I am the slave of Etang and Laggamon, who are scouting these mountains for patches of land that can be farmed by Rab methods."

"I have often seen your three fires when flying over this region. Probably you have never heard me go over. My plane is almost perfectly silent." Again she gestured with her gloved hand, toward the deep blackness where her plane was evidently parked. Then in that low, intent tone of inquiry, "I do not mistake the meaning of your three fires?"

"They are the ancient Venortian symbol of hope," Nort's words came forth with a reverence that his masters would have been surprised to hear.

"Then I have not misjudged you," said the girl. "You realize that I am Three-eyes because I wear that symbol. I have come with a message of hope for all enslaved Venortians."

"You have come—from where?"

"From a distant planet, where my parents and all escaped Venortians found refuge."

"They are alive? Then there *is* hope!"

"They are coming back soon. That is my message. Make ready. When they come it will be war, but it will be victory if the enslaved Venortians are ready to help."

"Will it be soon?" Tears of eagerness and happiness surged near the surface of Nort's eyes.

"Perhaps a matter of days. I cannot say. When we were sent forth, the preparations were moving ahead rapidly. That was more than a season ago. Four of us, each with planes, came in a small space ship to spread the secret news. Our landing met with disaster. I am the only one of the four who lived to carry on the work. But every true Venortian has helped to pass the word along. And the stupid Rabs who get wind of it call it superstition. But I must hurry on."

Three-Eyes extended her gloved hand to Nort, who pressed it between

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his two rough palms.

"I'll do anything I can."

"There'll be something for everyone, to do, even if the fighting ships land on the opposite side of the planet." The girl's deep, penetrating dark eyes lingered on the blood marks in Nort's shirt. She reached into an inner pocket of her black cape brought forth a small jar of cream. Her smooth fingers were gentle, caressing, as she spread the cream on his wounds.

"This will ease your wounds."

And as she spoke, Nort could no longer feel any pain. He uttered the Venortian words that expressed deepest appreciation.

To which Three-Eyes replied with a long-forgotten word for farewell. Then she was gone. And though Nort listened almost until dawn, he never heard her plane when it soared away.

CHAPTER II

A War Fleet in the Sky

"GET up, your damned lazy wretch!" Laggamon punctuated his words with a crack of the blacksnake. Nort wisely slept out of range. Neither of his masters ever bothered to climb out of bed in order to make the day's first crack of the whip effective. They were content to shout and curse at him until such time as the spirit moved them to get up. And they never got up until Nort had breakfast ready and waiting.

Nort rose stiffly. He was already dressed, except for his boots. He stirred one of the fires, started breakfast, hurried to the spring for water.

"Get a move on, Harmless!" Etang shouted in a harsh sleepy voice.

Harmless! That was what they called him — the harmless old man. Nort felt a twinge in his shoulders, a tingle at his finger-tips.

While the pails filled with water, Nort seized time to finish strapping his boots with the odds and ends of ragged straps that still clung. Involuntarily his eyes roved skyward. Pink dust of dawn. Impenetrable haze. A vague hint of purple, high overhead;—that was doubtless a sharp-edged cloud, screened by the opaque fog of floating soil.

Nort's furtive eyes shot back toward the camp. He must not be seen sky-gazing. Or day-dreaming. Or trembling from the strange new boundless emotions—

Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! What a mystical creature! No wonder every Venortian slave was whispering, 'Have you seen her'?

Stop thinking about her! Stop, or they'll hear your heart pounding! They'll see it in your face. They'll probe you and torture for your secret. They'll kill you, before the time is ripe *for you to kill them*—

Harmless old man! All right, let them think it. But for the lashings you would be in the prime of life. And harmless? Well, let them think it, but when that day comes that Three-Eyes foretold—

The hand-ball blasters! Slip a few of them out, hide them. Miscount the ones you use to clear the trails for them. Then when the day comes you'll be ready. Blast them into elements! Let their pulverized cells enrich the soil they've set adrift!

Stop thinking about it! They'll hear your heart!

Nort's gaze again swept the purple streak in the sky overhead, lowered to take in the vast fingers of mountain that pointed out into the plains where the floor of farmland stretched, brown and barren, toward a horizon lost in haze. The richest of plains were turning to desert under the ruthless monster-

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machines of the Rabs.

In their day the Venortians, too, had used machines; but their machines had been made to work *with* the soil, not against it.

Nort's eyes lingered upon the pinkish-white stone structure halfway down the mountainous valley. There was a sturdy reminder of the old days. It had been a Venortian power station.

Now it was one of the Rabs' many defense outposts. The barrel of a huge atomic gun extended upward on an angle from the top of the building, like a black smokestack caught in the act of falling.

Except for the sight of that gun, Nort liked to look at the old power station and think of the glorious past.

Water no longer ran down the long winding concrete pipeline; once it had roared with the rush of an unlimited supply of waterpower. But the Rabs had scorned water-power as obsolete, and irrigation as primitive. With their coming, the forests had been depleted, lake dams had fallen into neglect, and water flumes such as this one had gone silent.

A film of dust gathered on each pail of water as Nort jogged back to camp.

He paused for a final moment of nostaglic sentiment as he crossed over the square-topped concrete pipeline. All the way down the old power station it trailed, like a perfectly graded railroad bed. It was solid beneath Nort's boots. For all its long disuse, it showed no signs of decay. The concrete encasement was too thick to give forth much of a hollow plunk when Nort kicked a stone across it.

On up the mountainside it wound, like a serpentine path of steel ablaze with morning light, blotched here and there by small landslides that had covered it over. Nort wondered if water would ever run through it again.

BACK at camp, Nort made swift work of the breakfast preparations, ate his own meal as he worked—for he never sat down with his masters if he could avoid it. He loaded the cart with the tools he had sharpened and polished the evening before. He carefully packed in a few hand-ball blasters to be used if Laggamon wanted to explode away some obstructions.

"Harmless!" Laggamon called between bites.

"Yes, Master Laggamon?"

"Get me the air map of this region."

"It's in your hip pocket, Master Laggamon."

Laggamon grunted. Etang gave a snort and made a light jab at the Venortian slave for knowing the contents of his masters' pockets, at which Nort smiled discreetly.

Laggamon spread the map before him, passed a finger across one side of it to trace their course. Most of the valley surrounding the outpost he had already crossed out with a blue pencil. Here and there he had encircled a patch with red.

"Not much land worth farming between these strings of mountains," Laggamon muttered, crossing out the previous day's survey with a blue pencil.

"Old Harmless thinks there's lots of good land through here," Etang said with a wink. "Don't you, Old Man?"

"It used to be good," said Nort. He took a lash of the blacksnake without looking up. The tart answer had escaped his lips before he could stop it. His spirits were too high. If his heart didn't stop thumping so loud, he would never get through the day.

Nort continued to apply grease to the axles of his little steel tool cart. He was bending down. To the two Rabs the back of his shaggy head was much in evidence.

Laggamon droned on.

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"We can't be bothered by Nort's kind of land. Any areas that can't be stirred and seeded with our flying plows and planters aren't worth bothering about. When all the good grounds are gone we'll simply have to find another planet. Our standard of living—"

"Laggamon, look at that!" Etang interrupted.

"What?"

"The Harmless Old Man's hair!"

"Well, by the gods!"

Shaggy as Nort's hair was, the Rabs could neverthless discern the high white streak running upward from the back of the neck across the base of the skull. It was crudely cut, but it was unmistakable—the symbol of Venortian allegiance.

"When did you do *that?*" Leggamon demanded.

"Speak up, wretch!" Etang roared.

"Last night," Nort answered. "Late last night."

THE white-line design in the Venortian hair cut had once been nothing more than an accepted style. The Rabs had made it a matter for persecution. Everything Venortian must be stamped out completely.

"Come here, Harmless!" Laggamon ordered. "Bring the scissors with you!"

Etang rubbed his hands together. "Nothing like a little sport to start the day right."

Nort obediently bent before his two masters. The scissors began to chop over the surface of his head. He watched the bunches of gray-brown hair fall to the sand, and wondered if Three-Eyes would recognize him if she ever saw him again.

"If we had time we'd shave his damned head," Laggamon suggested.

"And paint it with Rab colors. It wouldn't take much time. We can always make up lost time by keeping him on the double-quick all day. Besides, there's nothing we need around here so much as a little discipine. I'll get a razor."

"And some paint, Etang."

Then both of the Rabs suddenly forgot what they were about, for the gentle rumble of a motor car sounded from somewhere down the valley road.

"Shine up my boots, Harmless!" Laggamon abruptly ordered.

"Mine too," shouted Etang, returning from the truck. "Who do you think it is, Laggamon?"

"Probably Kentl again. He gets lonesome down at that outpost by himself."

Nort when to work on four boots at once, the two men standing before him, their eyes turned toward the valley.

"Strange," Etang mused, "that they keep a paralytic on that job."

"Why not? There's nothing to do," Laggamon retorted. "Nothing, unless you take stock in the predictions old Harmless used to make. By the way, Harmless, what about those those old rusty predictions? Are a few lashes on the back too great a price to pay for the right to express a few eloquent bars of Venortian patriotism?"

"Perhaps," said Nort without looking up.

Laggamon prodded him with a boot.

"It's been many a season since you've hinted that your fly-away Norts might come back some day and blast us off this planet—" Laggamon broke off, fascinated by the pronounced tremble in his servant's hands. "Look, Etang, look at that damned wretch shake!"

Etang gave an amused bark.

"We scared the wits out of him on that shave and paint job."

As the sounds of the car rounded the last hairpin curve the boot job came

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to a quick finish. The two Rabs turned, with spick-and-span manners, to greet their company.

It was Kentl in his official car. He plowed into the camp site with a harsh stop, he was shouting.

"They're over us! They're coming down. I know they are! It's them! Come on! You've got to help me!"

KENTL'S body, partially paralyzed, seemed to fairly explode as he shouted. His withered arm jerked about wildly, his official Rab guardsman's uniform fluttered in disarray, his uncontrolled face contorted in torment.

"Talk like a sane man!" Laggamon demanded, pacing up to the car. "What's wrong?"

Kentl went over his words with even more fury, angered that the two surveyors didn't share his excitement at once. He swung his better arm erratically at the skies.

"Invaders, invaders, I tell you! They're going to land! They've got an armada up there!"

"How do you know?"

"Scouting plane, damn it! It circled down last night—then went back! They're up there. You can see them through the telescope. A whole damned fleet, hovering right over me!

"Why the devil didn't you report to —"

"Hell, I've tried all night long! Couldn't get through!" Kentl wailed with an awful shake of his head. "Damned instruments all knocked out. Nothing in shape down there but the big gun. But that's all we need. Only my damned arms—you've got to help me with the levers! Get in!"

It all happened so quickly that Nort couldn't collect his thoughts. He stood by, dazed and helpless. The wild joy that leaped through him at the prospect of a return of his people went frozen with terror. Those big atomic motors! They could paint the sky with death. Only a thrust of a lever or two would be necessary.

The three Rabs started away, Laggamon at the wheel. On the instant Nort whirled to the truck. He would follow. He would crash them—plunge them over an embankment! No matter if he was killed! But let no Rabs' hands touch the atomic gun. Then that blessed sky armada would be safe to come down, seize a foothold.

But like the racer who jumps the gun and forfeits the race, Nort started for the truck a moment too soon. From the Rabs' car, curving away in a cloud of dust, came a shrill shriek of brakes. At high speed the car came backing up to the camp.

For a split second Nort flinched. He was caught! But not if he got to the truck before they did. Etang leaped out of the car. Then it was a race of hard pounding footsteps, straight toward the driver's cab of the truck. A race between Venortian and Rab—slave and master.

"Stop, you damned traitorous whelp! I'll—"

Etang's bellow, from three paces back of Nort, carried the ring of rage—the rage of a master being openly defied for the first time by a slave he had faithfully beaten for many seasons. But Etang had not neglected to bring his whip.

The blacksnake cracked out, wrapped around Nort's ankle, jerked him to a hard fall against the side of the truck. Then Etang laid on the blows. But only for a moment. There was no time.

"I'll tend to you later!"

ETANG mounted the driver's cab. The truck roared. Nort, lying in a beaten heap, rolled to escape the wheels. He lay there motionless,

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breathing hard, mumbling with each breath. . . . Venortian curses. The car and the truck disappeared from view. Nort sprang up.

There was still a chance. For a few minutes the Rabs would be riding the switchback trail, down the mountainside from the camp. There was still a chance—

Nort ran to the little steel tool wagon, grabbed a spade and a crowbar. He filled his pockets with a double handful of the potent little hand-ball blasters. He sped toward the turn of the trail as hard as he could go. The roar of the two vehicles thundered up to his ears. The cloud of dust widened.

Car and truck were shooting along on the third level below him. He dropped his tools, hurled a hand-ball toward the path of the car. And a second and a third. One by one they descended over the mountain slope—and fell short.

Each missile threw up a fan of black earth and rocks and a cloud of dust. One large rock started rolling downward—Nort's heart leaped hopefully at the sight—but the boulder only thumped to a stop when it reached the road. The cars were already on the level beyond.

The blasts from the explosions echoed back from the mountainsides and were lost in the roar of motors.

Frantically Nort plied his tools, trying in vain to start a landslide that might still overtake them. Rocks bounced downward with the vigor of gigantic molecules, but one after another they dissipated their energies harmlessly. The Rabs were away!

Nort stalked back to the camp level, a sick man. His eyes roved over the ashes of the three fires—his symbol of Venortian hope. Scarcely an ember glowed. Nor did he stir the white ashes. Now he watched the heavens.

The haze was thinning. The wisp of purple cloud he had seen earlier was still there, its jagged edges more sharply defined. It was the armada, hovering high overhead like a floating skyline almost lost in the distance. How many hundreds of ships—or thousands—within that mass of purple, he couldn't hope to guess. But that made no difference now, he reasoned.

Before mid-day the Rabs would release death from the big gun. One by one the ships would drop like hailstones, to break on the mountainsides.

Or would they descend at once, before the Rabs reached the power-station? If they only would! But no, they wouldn't take such a chance of being sighted from distant cities. They would wait for night—but night would never come for them.

Nort watched them as one might watch a friend waiting for the guillotine—a friend that one might have saved. But now it was too late.

Nort's hands clung to the side of the little tool cart, he buried his ragged head in his arms.

"Lost! Lost! And I might have —" his voice choked away. The dust sifted over his tortured body.

"There is still time to help," came a voice from a little distance. Nort looked up. At first he wasn't sure whether it was a voice or simply the freakish echoes of wind blowing through the rocks and trees. But it came again. "There is still time to help, Nort. . . But you must act quickly!"

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, springing up. "Where are you?"

His gaze combed the camp site, the trees and underbrush beyond. He looked up to the ravine beyond the concrete pipeline.

"Where are you, Three-Eyes?"

"Over here. My plane is grounded. I've tried all night to fix it. But it's

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impossible. That's why I'm still here. Hurry, Nort! Bring your tool cart—"

The voice was lost in a gust of wind. Nort whirled about, mystified. He couldn't see the grounded plane anywhere. He wasn't even sure which way the voice came from.

"The tool cart, Nort!" It was that same low intent tone of voice, but even stronger with urgency. "I haven't any way to warn them, Nort. They'll come down today, I'm sure. Or tonight. But whether they come down dead or alive depends upon you! Come!"

"I'm coming!" Nort cried, catching the tongue of his tool wagon

"Throw out the tools, Nort. You'll only need the flashlanterns and the explosives. . . . *This way, Nort!*"

CHAPTER III

Last Hope

HE dragged the little steel wagon as fast as he could go—across the sandy tracks he had made toward the spring. He stopped short before the square surfaced trail of concrete—the old Venortian water tunnel.

Nowhere did he catch sight of Three-Eyes. But he didn't stop to question her commands. Now he understood.

He seized a hand-ball blaster, hurled it, then dropped under the steel wagon and waited for the fragments to fall.

The thudding ceased, and before Nort's eyes was a section of the concrete tunnel torn wide open. In an instant he was in, and the wagon with him. The tunnel was fully six feet in diameter—dry and musty.

Nort jumped on the wagon, stomach down, eyes ahead, and shoved off with a powerful push of his ragged boot against the floor. Into the long black cylindrical cavern he rolled.

At first the grade seemed too slight to be effective. Then the wagon began to gain speed. The daylight back of him began to fade. But abruptly Nort stopped. There was a triangle of eyes in the darkness before him.

Three dots of brightness standing solid, unmoving, in the center of his cavernous path! Three clusters of jewels catching the dimly reflected light of day! Could this be Three-Eyes again? *Inside* the tunnel?

Nort turned on the flashlantern. The three scintillating eyes became adornments on the black costume of a hooded figure. A jeweled belt-clasp and two shoulder ornaments.

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, leaping to his feet. "I thought you—"

"You thought I was outside—and so I was. I entered through a break in the tunnel." The girl hurried toward him, slipping the hood off, revealing the same beautiful face that Nort had looked upon the night before. "I shall ride with you, Nort. It may take both of us—"

They mounted the little steel wagon, clutched tightly as it gained speed. Daylight was lost behind. They coasted into what seemed an endless passage of unexplored blackness. There was a momentary flick of sunlight—the break in the walls where Three-Eyes had entered, no doubt.

Faster—faster! Click. . . click. . . click! Like giant tiles laid end to end the sections of concrete flew past them, now a straight-away, now a shift curve. The flashlantern fought the dark like a candle against the night.

"We'll be there almost as soon as the Rabs," Three-Eyes sang out against the roar of the wheels. Her voice made round alto echoes through the long passage. Nort could feel her tense breathing close against the back of his neck. "Have you many explosives?"

"Ten or twelve," Nort called back.

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His teeth were clenched, his muscles taut. Every bend was more dangerous than the last, for they were still gaining speed. He guided the cart with wonderful skill. He was losing all sense of direction, of time, of distance.

On and on came the mysterious stream of blackness, unfolding at an ever swifter pace. Sometimes a spot of outdoor light would flash across the path. Sometimes clumps of soil and rocks would loom up, to deal them a rough joggle as they coasted over. The joints of the giant tiles had allowed bits of landslides to wedge through. But only once did they have to blast their way through an obstruction. And again they were off.

A fresh flashlantern helped. Then, after, a time. a third flashlantern was pressed into service. This time the shift was made without a stop, but it almost resulted in a costly accident. The speeding wagon was momentarily thrown into a perilous balance. Nort's hand, cramped and knotted on the wagon tongue, jerked abruptly. The wagon swerved.

IN that swerve Nort scraped against the flying wall, ripped his shirt, burned his shoulder. But the wagon righted itself and sailed on. Nort could hear the beautiful girl breathing in quick, fearful gasps.

"Were you hurt, Three-Eyes?"

"No, I'm—I'm all right."

The clutch of her hands around his waist seemed to be slipping. Now came a long straight-away. For minutes they seemed to be falling downward through a bottomless shaft. And every minute Nort felt that the warm fingers clutching at his sides were growing weaker.

"Hold me tight!" Nort called.

"Don't mind me!" came the gasping reply. "Keep going. . . ." And after a little time she repeated the half-whispered command. "Keep going. . . Whatever happens to me, keep going. . . . Time is short. . . ."

The tunnel shuddered. A roar echoed up through it— a low ominous thunder.

"Could that be the atomic gun?" Three-Eyes cried out against the rumbling echoes.

"The atomic guns are noiseless," Nort muttered fiercely.

"Then that must have been a falling ship!" And a moment later when the thundering echo repeated, she added knowingly, "Another ship. They're crashing against the mountainside. We're almost too la—*Keep going!*"

The final command came from Three-Eyes as she fell. The wagon dashed over a clump of obstructing rocks, cutting its speed. Nort burned his boot against the tunnel wall to try to stop, but he was unable to prevent the girl's fall.

He glanced back, almost stopped.

"Keep going!" she called out. "I'm not hurt. I'll come! Keep going Kee-e-e-ep goin-n-ng!"

He could only see the three dots of light that adorned her black costume. The swiftness with which they receded warned him that he was accelerating down a sharper grade.

"Kee-ep goin-n-ng!" The musical call went round and round in the tunnel fading fainter, fainter. Nort could still feel that last lingering touch of her warm fingertips as they slipped past the tear in his shirt.

The end of the tunnel was just ahead. The shaft turned sharply downward. He scooted to a stop. Another thundering crash best his ears.

Another ship! That meant that the big atomic gun was finding its mark, scraping the edges, at least, of the hovering fleet. Soon they might be falling like a shower of stones from a volcano.

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NORT remembered this downward turn of the water flume, having seen it from the outside. It was the turn that had once led straight down to the Venortian turbines.

Down the steel ladder he went, trying to carry the wagon with him. The thing was terribly heavy. But he might need it. He had a half-formed plan . . . but he wasn't sure what he would find . . . or what he could do. Down—down—his arm was breaking, his torn shoulder bleeding a stream. But he had a plan—

The hand-ball blasters spilled out, plummeted down the open shaft toward the daylight. Everything went—explosives and flashlanterns—but Nort clung to the wagon, fought his way on down the ladder.

The light of the explosions glared up at him, but he was never sure that he heard their blast. Another terriffic rumble pounded against the mountainside somewhere near, and sent its heavy thunder leaping up through the concrete.

This time Nort caught a glimpse of the ship, rolling and spilling over the rocks. Uniformed Venortians tumbled out of the wrecked hull, as dead as stones.

Nort's ladder had suddenly come to an end in mid-air. The old water flume had been cut away to made room for the vast base of the atomic gun. Down across the open court he could see the glass enclosed control room where the three Rabs stood. Laggamon was at the controls, Etang and Kentl were at a window watching the rain of dead, Venortians. Kentl was leaping about in an uncontrolled frenzy of jubilation, Etang was pacing, slapping the folded whip against his thigh, as if he were the master of the world.

No one saw Nort. No one thought to look across to the catwalk that led led around the vast base, passing beneath the dangling end of the flume ladder. The center of their interest was in the other direction.

In a final burst of energy, Nort leaped to the catwalk, dragging the wagon with him. He rounded the narrow curving walk, spiraled upward into a level that was dense with shadows. Shadows streaked with gleaming copper cables, brightened intermittently by rattling sparks.

Instantly Nort gambled his chances on the two lead wires, which stretched, bright and bare, into the opaque shadows. He had only his steel wagon and his life to give. He gave. He hurled the wagon with all his might. . .

CHAPTER IV

A Dreamer's Victory

THAT day the armada of Venortians landed in the mountain valley beside the old power station. The days that followed brought the opening attacks upon the cities of Rabs. There were victories, there were defeats, then more victories. At last, when a season had passed, the planet was again in the hands of its rightful owners, and every Venortian who had been a slave was now a victor.

One of the many military parties assigned to the conferring of honors upon citizens motored up the newly-surfaced mountain road to a tourists' stop known as Nort's Outpost.

Nort, bareheaded, his hair neatly trimmed in the customary Venortian style, came down the steps to confront the party.

"I have a group of tourists waiting to enter the tunnel. Have you come to join us?"

The tourists gathered on the porch

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back of him, but the military-honors party disregarded them. A marshal stepped forward, extending a jeweled medal."

". . . to you, Nort, for highly meritorious service," said the marshal smiling. "Since you disregarded our summons to come for this award, we were forced to bring it to you."

"It does not belong to me," Nort protested. "It belongs to Three-Eyes—"

"To you," declared the marshal, still holding forth the medal. "All Venortia knows how you were found hanging to the steel wagon that you somehow hurled across the wires. Though no one knows by what miracle you survived that daring deed. You were found half dead from electrocution—but, as all Venortia knows, you stopped the atomic gun—"

"The reward belongs to Three-Eyes, I tell you. She came to me, even as death was ready to claim me—"

"Three-eyes is a beautiful myth," said the marshal. "Without that myth, the enslaved Venortians would not have been ready to help."

The marshal pinned the glittering medal upon Nort.

"I shall give it to Three-Eyes."

The marshal smiled. "Do with it as you will."

Nort turned to the waiting tourists, led them away by the crooked mountain path to the break in the pipeline.

The military party loitered about, fascinated by the mystic feelings that the one-time slave had somehow engendered in them.

"He's one who will never be convinced," said the marshal's lieutenant. "I've heard he even claims his wounds were soothed by a magic salve applied with Three-Eyes' own hands."

"A curious superstition," said the marshal. "But we've proved conclusively that it is nothing more. First, we know that no party of Venortian scouts ever landed, previous to the night of our attack. Next, we've never found any trace of Three-Eyes, living or dead. Thirdly, we've traced the myth to its origin—a child's prank on a dark night. But someone was taken in, and from then on, every downtrodden person tried to see those three eyes in the dark—our symbol of hope."

"Then the symbol became a beautiful girl, whispering words of encouragement—"

"All a myth—but their faith in what they *thought* they saw spread like wildfire!"

"Odd," said the lieutenant a bit skeptically, "that it should have happened during the very season that we were preparing."

"Perhaps when telepathy is better understood," said the marshal, "it will not be so odd."

The two officers fell silent. The people were returning from the tunnel, murmuring in low voices. There was a strange rapture in their faces. They spoke in reverent whispers—*of Three-Eyes, whom they had seen in the darkness*. They spoke of the singing echoes they had heard—ceaseless echoes that seemed to say, *"Keeeep goinnnng! Keeeep goinnnng!"*

The people departed. Tomorrow others would come, some believing, some skeptical.

Nort smiled to himself as he plodded up the steps. He was not a slave, he was not a harmless old man—no, no Rab would ever rise from the dead to call him that again. He was Nort the Venortian, as proud as any man who lived.

He paused to look out over the vast valley—a valley that was beginning to bloom again. Proud he was of that valley, and proud of the view which he

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commanded from this cabin—the cabin the Venortian government had helped him build.

And he was happy. Let them think that Three-Eyes was a figment of his imagination. He knew better. He could still feel her fingers on his mutilated back; on the ragged whip-wounds that had healed so marvelously well. He knew she was real, and he knew that someday she would come to him again. She still lived—for if she had died, he would have found her body in the tunnel.

Until she came, he would wait—and be happy with those other people, those tourists, who could also see . . . three eyes in the dark!

« IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD! »

If you are adventure bent and have a flair for the scientific, you can carve out a career for yourself by taking a course recently offered at the University of Michigan. Scientific adventuring and exploration is the background of this course, with actual field work in such far-off regions as the Yukon being included in the study requirements. Also included in actual work in the various uncharted wilds to which the students are sent, is land mapping, study of animal and plant life, and geological and natural resources estimation.

THAT BIG EYE

The much discussed giant telescope under completion at the California Institute of Technology is 640,000 times the strength of your own eyesight. In other words, if you stood on a street in New York looking at a sign on a shop window on the other side, you would—through the use of the giant telescope—be able to move that sign clear across the continent, to San Francisco, and still be able to read its every letter! Another interesting expectation concerning the giant 'scope which holds scientists breathless with anxiety, is the fact that—once completed—the Great Eye is expected to reveal over *one million new universes* whose existence has hitherto been unproven!

DON'T BET ON THIS

Undoubtedly you've heard the expression, "I'll eat my shirt," and just as undoubtedly, you've probably thought of it as an absurdly fantastic bit of phraseology. Nevertheless, it can be done—literally. A Harvard chemistry professor, having made a bet that he would eat his shirt if something didn't occur as he predicted, fulfilled his bet through his knowledge of science. After dissolving his shirt in acid, then neutralizing the acid with a base, he filtered the precipitated matter, carefully spread it on a piece of bread—and ate it!

SCIENCE AND THE CROOKED GAMBLER

The next time you feel the urge to "play a friendly hand" or "roll a few for the baby's shoes," pause long enough to remind yourself what science has done to make the art of crooked gambling even more nefarious. There is a large middle-western manufacturing company which puts out all sorts of crooked gambling devices. This company manufactures no less than 62 various decks of marked cards which absolutely defy detection, and 73 types of "loaded" transparent dice which have been so cleverly made that they can be weighed, measured, cut, burned, or tested with calipers—and still defy any efforts to prove their dishonesty!

THE FUTURE LOOKS SILENT

Recently a time capsule was sealed into the corner of a New York building. But, unlike other time capsules, this one contained merely recordings—of street noises! It was explained that honking horns, police whistles, cries of newsboys, screeching of brakes, rumblings of traffic, and other common city noises, would very probably be nonexistent in future metropolitan areas. The playing of these recordings, it was stated, would enable future generations to hear what they were missing!

STOMACH ACHE

The hydrochloric acid in the human stomach is some twenty-five thousand times that of a fatal dose of carbolic acid. Remember this the next time you burn your hand in a laboratory. No wonder they call it "intestinal fortitude"!

DINOSAURS AS DOG FOOD

In Siberia, peasant farmers on the frozen wastes occasionally discover perfectly preserved and frozen mammoths, over ten thousand years old! These ancient animals, which made their last stand in Siberia thousands of years ago while retreating southward before the ice, were trapped in the soft, ice-water marshes and frozen solidly into the tough soil. Some of them, on discovery, are still with hide, flesh, hair, and even undigested remains of food in their stomachs. To the peasant who unearths them, however, this is of little importance, for he merely rips off enough red meat from the ancient mammoths to feed his dogs!—*John York Cabot.*

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Romance of the Elements - - - Chlorine

CHLORINE is number 17 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Cl and its atomic weight is 35.457. It is a greenish-yellow gas possessing a disagreeable smell. It is about 2.5 times heavier than air. It may be condensed to a liquid, and boils at 33.6°. It enters into compounds with almost every other element.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Chromium.

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by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

MORTIMER MEEK raked a cold eye over the desks and typewriters of the Snappy Service Loan Company. Squaring his narrow shoulders he pointed an accusing finger at a lattice wire wastebasket.

"So," he hissed, "it's you, Bloody Bill, who started this mutiny. With your guns and your gold you've corrupted my sailors, incited them to rebel."

Here Mortimer Meek paused dramatically, glared about the empty office, and then flung his head back at a defiant tilt.

"Well it won't work," he cried, his voice swelling to a squeaky shout, "because you are helpless against the power of my will. You are powerless to resist my commands. And I command you to put down your guns. Put down your guns and clear off the bridge of my staunch ship, the whole sorry lot of you."

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The MASTERFUL MIND of MORTIMER MEEK

All he had to do was command, and he was obeyed! But would his power work when his very life depended on it?

To his amazement, Myfisto obeyed his command to take a jump for himself!

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As the last command echoed through the office, Mortimer jerked himself up to his full height of five feet four inches and raised one arm challengingly above his head, triumph and vindication radiating from every inch of his puny frame.

"Mortimer Meek," a bewildered feminine voice snapped b e h i n d him, "whatever in the world are you doing?"

To say that the sudden voice startled Mortimer would be putting it mildly. He reacted as if he had been prodded with a red hot poker. A surprised squawk ripped from his throat and he sprang from the floor, his spindly arms flailing desperately.

Returning to earth, as it were, Mortimer's knees buckled suddenly, dumping him with a sickening thud on the hard floor. Flat on his face, his arms and legs spreadeagled like a butterfly on canvas, he presented a ludicrous spectacle.

Painfully conscious of this, Mortimer scrambled to his feet, to face a girl—*the* girl in Mortimer's life, as a matter of fact—whose delicate, lovely features registered every expression from exasperated annoyance to scornful amusement.

"Betty," he gasped, "I didn't know you were here. I mean," he struggled on desperately, "you don't usually get down to work this early. I got here ahead of time so I could practice."

"Practice for what?" Betty asked in a tone of voice that would have bored through chrome steel.

"I didn't tell you about it," Mortimer said excitedly, "because I wanted to surprise you." There was a jittery tremor in his voice and his heart was behaving foolishly as it always did in Betty's presence.

"You see," he explained, "I'm taking a correspondence school course in will power. Every lesson I have to overcome a difficult situation. This morning I had to put down a mutiny on board my ship. All by myself and with just my will power. The book says it isn't fair to use weapons no matter how tight a spot you're in."

"Oh does it?" Betty planted her hands on her shapely hips. "Does it really?"

"Yes it does," Mortimer rushed on blissfully unaware of the storm signals. "That's one of the most important things.

"But," he added slyly, "sometimes I cheat. As a matter of fact, just last week I had to pull a knife on a big bully down in Mexico."

BETTY was ordinarily a patient, sweetly understanding creature but one would never guess it from her present reaction.

"Mortimer Meek," she blazed, "what *has* happened to you? This is the most terrible thing I've ever heard of."

"But it was self defense," Mortimer pleaded, "he was about to strangle me."

"Oh I don't mean that," Betty said helplessly. "I mean this n o n s e n s e about will power lessons. Talking to yourself, dreaming all of these wild, impossible situations. That's what I mean. You're going crazy."

"Crazy?" Mortimer said in a grieved voice. "You just don't understand, that's all. I'm trying to develop my will power so that people will respect me. Why it's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

"If that's what you think," Betty said grimly, "then I'm through with you. Until you get these wild ideas out of your head you can just forget about those . . ." her voice was suddenly uneven ". . . those plans we had."

"But I can't give it up," Mortimer cried frantically. "I paid for the course in advance."

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"Then I hope you'll be very happy with it," Betty said brokenly, She brushed a large tear angrily from her cheek, then turned and marched away.

Mortimer started after her, frantic pleas trembling on his lips, but his pursuit was abruptly checked by the opening of the office door and the entrance of the tall, cadaverous figure of Jeremiah Judson, president of the Snappy Service Loan Company.

Jeremiah Judson's motto was: "All work and no play is the way to spend the day," and with the possible exception of an income tax blank, nothing infuriated him more than the sight of an idle employee.

He stopped at sight of Mortimer's hesitating figure and then c o u g h e d meaningly.

Jeremiah Judson did n o t w a s t e coughs or anything else for that matter. This particular cough hinted strongly that time was passing and that there was work to be done, and furthermore there were hundreds of capable men who would be glad to take over Mortimer's job if he were tired of it.

Mortimer hesitated, t o r n between love and fear, but finally the latter triumphed and with a last mournful look at Betty's retreating figure, he turned and ducked across the office to his desk.

SAFE at his desk, where he interviewed prospective borrowers, there were routine matters to handle, and the office began to hum with the activity of a new day, people of all sorts to question and interview.

But through all these diversions a part of Mortimer's mind dwelt moodily on the events of the morning.

It was terrible to think that Betty was through with him. Terrible to think of facing life without her beside him. Suddenly he decided on a great sacrifice. He'd give up his will power lessons—that's what he'd do. He'd tell her so at noon.

"I'll go to her on bended knee," he murmured fervently, "and beg her forgiveness."

"Now ain't dat poetic," an unpleasantly nasal voice growled next to his desk.

Mortimer looked up, startled. He saw a large, tough looking young man, attired unbecomingly in a loudly checked, extremely cut tweed suit. His features were heavy and coarse and from his tightly clenched teeth a stubby cigar jutted belligerently.

"Don't let me distoib ya," the loudly dressed young man said with heavy sarcasm, "I c'n wait till ya finish dat poem. Time's nuttin' to Slug McNutty."

"I beg your pardon," Mortimer said stutteringly. "I must have been thinking of someone — of something else. Won't you have a seat?"

"Don't mind if I do, chum," the large young man slid into a chair next to Mortimer's desk and shoved his white fedora back to the crown of his head.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" Mortimer asked.

Slug McNutty looked quickly about the office and then leaned closer to Mortimer.

"All I want from you, chum, is a little information. And I'm tellin' ya, de easier de talk flows de easier it's goin' ta be on you."

"Why . . . why," gasped Mortimer, breathlessly, "what do you mean?"

"Just dis," the nasal growl sank to an ominous whisper. "Dis outfit of yours is makin' a special shipment of dough dis week in an armored truck. All I want to know from you is where dat truck is goin' to be at t'ree o'clock tomorrow aftanoon."

It took a little time for the full im-

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pact of Slug McNutty's words to make themselves felt on Mortimer's brain but when they did his knees began to tremble under the desk. He gazed desperately, beseeching about the office. Why . . . why, he thought wildly, this man is a gangster.

Mortimer knew the armored truck would be be at the corners of Plaza boulevard and Fifth Place at three the next afternoon. The shipping clerk had mentioned that to him but if he told that to the gangster . . . why he would be an accessory to the crime.

"I can't tell you," he croaked dazedly, "it wouldn't be honest . . . you must be joking."

"If you t'ink it's a joke," McNutty growled, "you got a good sense of humor. Dat truck is goin' to be knocked over tomorrow aftanoon and if you ain't willing to play ball wit us we're goin' to have to knock you off instead."

"Oh my goodness," Mortimer gasped, as a rising tide of panic engulfed him. He thought of crying out, screaming for help, but one frantic look at the gangster's ominously hardened jaw convinced him that his first scream would also be his last.

"Please," he begged, "don't pick on me. I don't want to be a criminal."

"We ain't pickin' on ya," McNutty returned impatiently, "we just want a little cooperation, that's all. Now look. I'm goin' to give ya de rest of de mornin' to get me de dope I want and I'll be back here after lunch. If you ain't got it you ain't goin' to be nuttin' but a memory at dis time tomorrow. And don't get any smart ideas about spillin' dis to anybody cause from now on one of de boys is goin' ta be on your tail. Get me?"

Mortimer stared with glassy, terrified eyes at the huge, ominous figure of the gangster and his head bobbed weakly on his neck.

"I get you," he whispered hoarsely. "I get you."

HIS heart continued to leap at his ribs like an imprisoned bullfrog for minutes after the heavy figure of Slug McNutty had disappeared from the office. And then as reason began to return, the hideousness of his plight struck him with the force of a loaded night stick.

If he acceded to the gangster's demands he would be guilty of grand larceny—just as surely as if he held up the truck himself. But if he didn't—he shuddered at the thought—there was no dodging the fact that Slug McNutty meant business.

He groaned and sank his head in his hands. Why did this have to happen to him? What would Betty say? The last thought snapped him upright in his chair.

Betty was through with him!

But no . . . when she learned of his trouble she couldn't stay angry with him. The thought cheered him slightly. He would see her at noon, take her to lunch and pour out his troubles into her sympathetic ear. She could help him, suggest something that might untangle him from this mess.

He felt a glow of confidence spreading its comfortable warmth about him as he thought of this. Feverishly impatient he watched the hands of the clock move with agonizing slowness from hour to hour, until at last they crossed at twelve and the bell announcing the lunch hour pealed through the office.

Before it stopped echoing Mortimer was out of his chair and halfway across the office. Betty was standing next to her desk adjusting a jaunty little hat on top of her dark curls when he reached her side.

"Darling, I've been a fool," he pant-

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ed, "I've got something terribly important to talk to you about."

"I'm sorry," Betty said coolly. "I'm afraid it will have to wait." She pulled out a tiny mirror and studied her carmined lips critically. "I have a date for lunch and I'm late now."

"About ready Betty?" a smooth masculine voice asked from behind them.

Betty looked up and flashed a brilliant smile over Mortimer's shoulder.

"I'm all ready, Jon," she said brightly.

Mortimer turned, his eyes following the direction of Betty's smile. They encountered a s l e n d e r, foppishly dressed young man whose blandly handsome features were creased in a smug, superior smile.

The foppishly dressed young man was Jon Debaere, a junior executive of the Snappy Service Company. Mortimer had never trusted him and now he realized that his suspicions had been well grounded.

"Just a minute," he said indignantly. "You're not taking my girl to lunch or anywhere else for that matter."

Jon smiled. A languid, superior smile. "You seem to be in your usual state of confusion," he purred, "but supposing we leave it up to the young lady. After all, it's her choice. What do you say, Betty?"

Betty hesitated and Mortimer seized the occasion to demonstrate his ignorance of feminine physchology.

"You're not going with him," he bleated shrilly. "Do you hear me?—You can't."

Betty reacted as any member of her sex would have. Her lips pressed tightly together and she marched past Mortimer and put her hand on Jon's arm.

"Shall we leave?" she asked, looking up at him. "I find the air getting a little close in here."

"But . . . but," gurgled Mortimer, "you can't do this. I need you. I'm in trouble. I've got to . . ."

"Sorry, old man," Jon broke in lightly "Just another case of the better man winning."

Before Mortimer's beaten and distracted brain could think of a rejoinder the two had moved off, and laughing gaily, passed through the door, out of the office.

Mortimer watched the door swing shut behind them, and a lump the size of a billiard ball crawled up his throat. His shoulders slumped wearily and his chest felt as if an elephant had suddenly sat on it. Gloom and despair blanketed his brain and with all this came the sharp, stinging sense of irretrievable loss.

"She'll be sorry," he muttered bitterly, "when she sees me lying on the floor, riddled with machine-gun bullets, wallowing in my own blood."

With this chilling thought settling over his spirit like a damp pall, he turned and plodded listlessly out of the office.

FIVE minutes later, leaving the building, he joined the throng of lunch-bound office workers. Immersed in his own troubles, Mortimer staggered on blindly for blocks until his way was obstructed by a hurrying stream of humanity, bound—he discovered on looking up—for a noisy carnival that had planted its mushroom-like tents and loud red posters on a vacant lot in the city district.

Ferris wheels were revolving, perspiring barkers were clamoring for the attention of the crowd and on a makeshift stage set back from the street, four scantily clad girls were wiggling their provocative torsos to the very vocal appreciation of the multitude.

Mortimer paused, fascinated. Carnivals and circuses had always possessed

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a strange enchantment for him. The bewitching glamor of the devil-may-care performers dazzled him and acted as a heady draught of wine to his sober soul.

He had no intention of dallying. In fact he reminded himself as he took the first timid steps into the sawdust sprinkled enclosure, that he would only look around.

Peering delightedly at the strange sights, he was borne along by the crowd and finally jostled in front of a small platform on which a heavy set barker was waving his arms for attention.

"Quieee-et pleeeeze," the barker's raucous voice rolled over the crowd like a wool blanket. An expectant hush settled over the milling throng.

"The exhibit which you are about to witness," he shouted impressively, "has thrilled and amazed every country of this great world. It is the most stupendous, incredible soul-chilling demonstration that human eyes have ever been privileged to behold. Myfisto, the incomparable, the one and only mental marvel, is waiting inside this tent to baffle you, to bewilder you, to mystify you with the wisdom and clairvoyance that have been handed down to him from the ancients who lived and died when Time was in her teens." The barker paused and wiped his face with a red and white handkerchief before launching into his peroration.

"And now," he bellowed, "the show is starting. Get your tickets while there is still time. This is an opportunity that comes but once in any man's existence. Don't let the price—the tenth part of a dollah—prevent you from witnessing the most amazing man the world has ever produced—Myfisto—the mental marvel."

As he finished speaking a five-piece band broke into a wild march that sent Mortimer's normally conservative blood dancing crazily through his veins.

He had no intention of going inside and therefore it was a slight surprise to find himself seated in the front row of the small tent peering expectantly at a dimly lighted stage hung with oriental trappings.

His troubles had disappeared into the limbo of lost things and with naive delight Mortimer waited to be mystified, amazed and bewildered.

He did not have long to wait. The heavy draperies parted slowly and a tall, impressive figure strode dramatically onto the stage. His skin was dark, almost black, and he was dressed in a strange, white garment that buckled at his shoulders and fell in rippling folds to the floor. His head was swathed in a red turban and where the bands crossed on his forehead a huge bright emerald blazed.

The strange figure stared silently at the awed crowd with dark, fathomless eyes, then he turned and walked silently to the side of the stage.

THE draperies parted again and the barker, dressed now in an oriental costume, stepped onto the stage. He held up one hand and walked to the front of the stage.

"Myfisto," he announced solemnly, "is ready to commence his exhibition. His first demonstration will be one of simple hypnosis. And for this it will be necessary to ask the assistance of a member of the audience." His eyes flicked calculatingly over the crowd. "Aha," he cried, "I see the very gentleman we need. Will the handsome young man in the first row kindly step up on the stage? There's nothing to be alarmed about. No danger at all."

Mortimer peered about excitedly, looking for the handsome young man who was to take part in the experiment.

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He saw no one that fitted the description. His attention was jerked back by a sharp dig in the ribs.

"Go ahead buddy," the fat man in the seat next to him whispered. "Show him you ain't afraid. Show 'm you got the guts."

"Me?" gasped Mortimer. "What . . ." He broke off and jerked his eyes back to the stage. The barker *was* pointing at him.

"No, no," he cried. "I can't. That is I . . ."

"It won't take a minute," the barker shouted over Mortimer's thin protests. "Let the young man through down there. Help him along."

The fat man put a heavy hand on Mortimer's shoulder and gave him a helpful shove that dumped him into the aisle.

"Go on," he whispered encouragingly. "He said there wasn't nothin' to be afraid of."

Helpful hands jerked Mortimer to his feet, pushed him along until he stood at the bottom of the steps that led to the stage.

The barker hopped down the steps, grabbed Mortimer's hand in a vise-like grip and dragged him up the steps onto the stage.

Mortimer stared helplessly about him. The barker had left his side, the audience had quieted to an expectant hush and Mortimer looked up to see Myfisto, the mental marvel, moving slowly toward him.

"Be not alarmed," Myfisto said in a deep, mellifluous voice. "You are becoming drowsy, a peaceful sleep is stealing over you."

This was not exactly the truth. Mortimer had never felt more thoroughly and completely awake.

For a space of several seconds Myfisto's black, all-knowing eyes bored into Mortimer's very soul; and then he looked up and signaled the barker.

"Our subject is ready," he said. "Let us prepare."

The barker bowed low, hurried off the stage—to return wheeling before him something that looked like a tea table. On top of the table reposed a square metal box, with wires leading from it to disappear under the table.

Myfisto stepped to the table, lifted the lid of the box and drew forth a curious shining object that looked like a stream-lined football helmet. On the side of the device there were several rheostats and gadgets and on the cone-shaped top of the peculiar object, tiny, shining wires were coiled in thick little clusters.

Mortimer edged closer and peered over Myfisto's shoulder. He saw that the interior of the dome was completely lined with glistening threadlike filaments. From these, insulated wires led to the box on the table.

Myfisto turned slightly.

"You will put this on," he said in a tone of voice that brooked no argument.

"But," gasped Mortimer, "I don't . . ."

"Fits excellently," Myfisto cut in as he raised the shining headpiece and pressed it down firmly on Mortimer's head.

Mortimer trembled. The thing felt funny on his head. The filament wires were pressing into his scalp as if they wanted to crawl right into his brain.

The barker turned and walked to the front of the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he bawled, "this object you see on the head of the subject is a device that coordinates electrical impulses with human thought waves. By this, the thought waves of Myfisto, the mental marvel, can be carried by electrical vibrations to the receptive brain of the subject. Thus the

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will of the subject becomes completely subservient to the will of the master."

An expectant hush settled over the audience as the barker retreated and Myfisto raised one arm dramatically over his head.

"Quiie-et," he hissed. "I must have absolute silence."

He picked up a rheostat from the table, peered at it closely and then bent down and threw a switch on the side of the box.

Instantly a faint humming reverberated across the stage.

MORTIMER looked about helplessly. There was a strange tingling sensation in his ears, a sensation that became more pronounced as the humming noise grew in volume. The wires pressing against his head seemed to be vibrating gently as the humming settled to a steady purr.

He felt a peculiar giddy sensation stealing over him as the wires seemed to burn into his very brain, as the strange tingle spread from his ears to the base of his skull.

Sweat stood out on his brow as the headpiece grew warm. He looked despairingly at Myfisto just in time to see him snap another switch on the other side of the box.

At the same instant he felt a sharp, painful prick at the base of his skull. As if a red hot needle had been jabbed into his flesh.

"Ouch," he cried, "that hurt." He grabbed the headpiece with both hands and jerked it off his head, and held it out accusingly. "What's the idea?" he demanded angrily.

Mortimer's comically indignant pose snapped the audience out of their temporary trance. Waves of laughter, loud, ribald laughter, broke from their lips to crash deafeningly about Mortimer's blushing ears.

Mortimer stared helplessly about him, his face a dull crimson, his eyes smarting with angry tears. They had got him up on the stage to make a fool out of him, to provide the audience with a laugh. That was all there was to it. To make an object of ridicule and derision out of him.

With this realization came a swift, bitter anger. He turned to the barker and waved a puny fist under his nose.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he fumed. "Making a laughing stock out of honest, law-abiding citizens. Well there's nothing funny about it," he shouted rather pointlessly, "nothing funny about it at all." He wheeled and marched indignantly to the steps but before he could descend the barker caught his arm.

"You got the wrong idea," he said anxiously. "Something funny as hell happened just now."

But Mortimer cut him off.

"Oh, you think it's funny," he cried. "Well then, just . . . just . . ." he plumbed his brain for the most scathing, derisive retort he could think of . . . "just go take a running jump for yourself. You, too," he shouted at Myfisto, "both of you, go ahead. See if I care."

With tears of humiliation blinding him, he pounded down the steps and fought his way through the crowd, his soul burning with bitter disgrace as the gleeful cries of the crowd suddenly swelled to riotous, screaming laughter.

Laughing at him, he thought with sickening mortification. Well, let 'em laugh. Struggling and sweating, he forced his way blindly through the milling audience and without a backward glance, broke free and plunged through the flap of the tent. . . .

Mortimer had not looked back . . . but if he had, he would have seen that the sudden clamorous roar of the crowd

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was not directed at him, but at something else far more amazing, far more arresting.

Myfisto and the barker had stood stock still as Mortimer stamped off the stage, a bewildered, dazed expression spreading over their features.

And then like men in a hypnotic trance they had raced to the edge of the stage and leaped into the air. A long, flying leap that landed them with a crash on the laps of the patrons of the third row of the tent.

They had taken a running jump for themselves!

THE tent was in an uproar as they attempted to extricate themselves from the tangle of legs and chairs. But over the din Myfisto's voice could be heard shouting:

"Catch him. Don't let him get away."

He scrambled to his feet, jerking the barker with him.

"Hurry," he hissed in the other's ear. "Follow me. We must stop him."

In another ten seconds, panting and disheveled, they burst through the flap of the tent. Myfisto gazed wildly about the milling throngs and a groan burst from his lips.

"We are too late," he gasped. "He is loose."

"What's it all about?" the barker asked bewilderedly. "What do you want that little guy for? And say," he cried suddenly, "what made us act like a pair of screwballs just now? Leaping off the stage into the audience."

Myfisto was still gazing distractedly at the faces that drifted by him and as he turned to the barker there was a frightened, terrified look in his eye.

"We couldn't help ourselves," he groaned. "We couldn't resist his will." His voice broke into an excited babble.

"It's the headpiece," he groaned. "It's worked. Gave that little man a terrible power. An irresistible will. Nobody can disobey him. We must stop him before he innocently unleashes the horrible power that is his."

"Are you goin' batty?" the barker said scornfully. "We've been usin' that thing for months in our act. It's nothin' but a phony; a gag to impress the audience. You know that as well as I do. You're goin' batty, I tell you."

"No, I'm not," Myfisto cried. "That headpiece was an invention of mine designed to increase by electrical stimulation the forces of will that are dormant in every human psyche. But it never worked; I thought it was a failure. So I used it in the act for effect. But now, somehow, it worked on this little man. We've got to stop him."

"Cripes," gasped the barker, incredulously. "If what you say is true, if nobody can resist that little guy's will, he's liable to turn this town upside down."

"That's why he must be stopped," Myfisto groaned. "When I was completing this machine I also developed an antidote for its effect. It may not work—but it's our only chance. We must find him, strip that power from him, before he has a chance to use its hideously destructive force. . . ."

TEN minutes later, looking like anything but a latent destructive force, Mortimer slouched into the bustling lobby of the Snappy Service building, his steps lagging as if they were reluctant to carry him to the elevator.

In comparison with Mortimer's beaten appearance a whipped cur would have looked like a jaunty, confident creature. The humiliation at the carnival, the prospects of facing the gangsters, the loss of his girl, all these rested on the shoulders of his spirit with a leaden, crushing weight. Gone

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was any notion of resisting or fighting back.

"What happens, will happen," he muttered with gloomy unoriginality.

He stepped into the elevator and squeezed back into the corner as the lunch hour crowd jammed in after him.

"Twelve, please," he squeaked over the mumble of voices.

More people were crowding into the elevator and Mortimer was crushed back against the wire netting of the car as they forced their way in. He wondered with uncertain timidity whether he had been heard.

"Twelve," he cried again. "Twelve, please."

The elevator operator, a haggard, perspiring young man, turned around and snapped.

"Okay, bud, I heard you." He turned back to the controls but suddenly the exasperated expression was wiped from his face to be replaced by one of respectful obedience. "Yes, sir," he stammered, "right away."

The door slammed shut with a bang, the throttle lever shot into place and the elevator started upward with giddy, unaccustomed speed.

"Three," a voice said.

"Five," said another.

Seven, eight and ten had been called by the time the elevator shot past the third floor.

"Hey, what's the idea?" a man cried. "I called three."

The elevator operator did not reply, merely shoved the throttle over another notch. The elevator responded with another burst of speed.

"Young man," a woman screamed shrilly, "let me off. You passed my floor!"

Other voices joined in the clamor and by the time seven, eight and ten had been swiftly passed, the noise in the car had swelled to a noisy babble.

"My time's valuable," the burly man in front of Mortimer shouted. "I'll take this up with the management."

Before he had got the last words out of his mouth the elevator stopped with sickening abruptness and the doors clanged open.

"Twelve, sir," the operator said respectfully.

"Now," the man in front of Mortimer bellowed, "let's see who it is that's so much more important than the rest of us."

"Pardon me." Mortimer quaked fearfully. "Could I step by, please?"

The man whirled and glared at Mortimer.

"So," he snapped, "it's you, is it? Who do you think you are, the King of Siam?"

"No, not at all," Mortimer stuttered, edging past his burly bulk. The angry, impatient muttering grew in volume as Mortimer struggled and twisted in an effort to force his way out of the jammed car. It was with a relieved sigh that he finally squirmed his way into the corridor. He turned, an apology trembling on his lips, but the operator, in response to the indignant demands of his passengers, had slammed the door and started back down.

"Well," gasped Mortimer, "what do you think of that?"

He walked toward the Snappy Service office shaking his head wonderingly. What had made the operator disregard the other passengers and whisk him up to the twelfth floor? He wrinkled his forehead trying to figure the thing out. Why should the elevator operator . . .

It was then he remembered the extra loud tone of voice he had used in calling his floor. He stopped suddenly, a strange excitement rushing over him. The loud voice! The commanding voice! That was what the will power book had insisted upon in every lesson.

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Was it possible . . .? Could it be that the will power lessons were beginning to work?

HE was still puzzling over the strange occurrence when he seated himself at his desk for the afternoon; and it was still buzzing around his head like an annoying fly when the first client of the afternoon sauntered up to Mortimer's desk and dropped himself into the chair alongside it.

Mortimer looked up to see a fat, flashily dressed little man regarding him with sly blue eyes set in a pink, bland face.

"What can I do for you?" Mortimer inquired, tearing himself away from the riddle of the elevator. "Something in the nature of a loan?"

"As a matter of fact," the fat little man said, "I could use a hundred or so. One of those things, y'know," he shrugged nonchalantly. "Caught a little short between the pater's monthly check. I could've borrowed a stack from young Vandergilt but I just learned he's out of town."

"Well, that's too bad," Mortimer said solicitously. It was his first experience with a real, honest-to-goodness playboy and as he handed the application blank to him he said eagerly, "just fill this out and I'm sure we'll take care of you." And as the flashily dressed "playboy" started away, he added perfunctorily, "Answer all questions accurately and truthfully to the best of your ability."

The pink-faced little man nodded and moved to the writing desk, seated himself and spread the form out in front of him.

Mortimer watched him as he started to write and then he turned back to his desk, his thoughts and worries returning with him.

It was a quarter of one and Slug McNutty had promised to be back "after lunch." he was due any minute. Looking over at Betty's desk he realized that she wasn't back from lunch yet. He thought of dimly lighted cocktail bars and Jon's glibly persuasive tongue and his soul writhed with jealousy and anger.

He writhed unhappily for a bit and then he turned his thoughts to the more menacing of his problems. The gangsters and their demand that he "case the joint" for them. Gnawing nervously at his pencil he tried desperately to think of some way out of his predicament.

It was about that time that the little man returned and with trembling fingers laid the application on Mortimer's desk.

Mortimer looked up and to his surprise the man was quailing visibly, a furtive, guilty look on his face as he peered about the office.

Looking back to the application blank, Mortimer spread it open on his desk and examined it.

"What . . . what the . . ." he gasped, but he was unable to finish the sentence for his mouth had dropped open in sheer astonishment.

For the flashily dressed "playboy" had written in answer to the question on the blank:

OCCUPATION—Confidence man.
PURPOSE OF LOAN—To skip town.
REFERENCES — None, except the ones I forged.

For a second Mortimer's brain reeled giddily and then he peered incredulously at the "playboy" who stood twisting his hat miserably in his hands.

"Why . . . what do you mean?" sputtered Mortimer.

"It's a racket," the self-indicted con man said hoarsely. He paused and swallowed nervously and a gleam of terror showed in his eye. "I've worked

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it all over the country, but—" he broke off, peering about apprehensively, "you told me to put down the truth and I . . . I just couldn't help myself. I just *had* to do what you said. I don't know whether I'm going balmy or not, but one thing's certain. I *am* going."

Before Mortimer could open his mouth the fat little man had wheeled, and with surprising speed, raced across the office and bolted through the door and out of sight.

Mortimer stared after the flying coattails, his mouth hanging open in ludicrous bewilderment and a dazed, unbelieving expression on his countenance.

He looked down at the application blank and as he did a sentence that the confidence man had spoken jumped before his eyes.

I just had to do what you said.

Mortimer trembled with excitement. Twice in a row his commands had been obeyed. It *must* be the will power lessons that were responsible for these amazing occurrences. He remembered a phrase from the book:

All men in whom greatness is dormant will one day be recognized for their true worth. A truly dominant spirit might manifest itself, even after years of timidity and uncertainty.

It came as a shock for Mortimer to realize that he was the dominant type and that people were beginning to appreciate him for his true worth. He stood up at his desk, his eyes focused on some far distant horizon and unconsciously his shoulders squared, his chin thrust out.

"Today," he whispered dramatically, "I am a man."

HE looked about him, seeing the office as it was for the first time. He saw the mole-like clerks at the desks, the cringing, frightened people waiting for their requests to be considered and he took another deep breath. About the third in his entire life.

Walking toward him he saw Bennie, the office boy, a lanky, callow youth, one of the minor banes of Mortimer's existence. Mortimer's head tilted defiantly, a stern, cold look froze on his face.

"Bennie," he snapped, and his voice would have delighted the author of the volume on will power, "come here."

Bennie turned, the impudent expression on his face gradually changing to one of dazed, helpless deference.

"Yes," he gulped, "right away."

He hurried to Mortimer's desk.

"What is it, sir?" he asked obediently.

"In the future," Mortimer said icily, "you will address me as Mr. Meek. And as for the present, get me a glass of water and be quick about it."

"Yes, sir," Bennie gasped. "Immediately, Mr. Meek."

He wheeled and with one last bewildered, frightened look over his shoulder, scurried away.

Mortimer sat down, a strange, intoxicating glow spreading over him. He *was* the domnant type. The book was right. "Assert yourself," it said, "and respect and obedience are yours for the asking."

Well, he had asserted himself—and it worked!

Bennie was back with the water and Mortimer seized the glass in one firm hand and stood up again.

"To the new Mortimer Meek," he cried, and then he tilted the glass and drained the water in one long gulp.

You cannot go about a modern business office drinking toasts to yourself without attracting a certan amount of undesirable attention, and, in this respect, the Snappy Service office was no exception.

"What is the meaning of this?" a

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chilled voice inquired behind him.

Mortimer spun around to face the formidable figure of Jeremiah Judson, president of Snappy Service. Under the stare of Jeremiah's gimlet-like eyes, his confidence melted away, like putty before a drill.

"Heh, heh," he laughed weakly, in an attempt to convince Mr. Judson that the whole situation was very droll. "Heh, heh, just a little joke. Think nothing of it."

Jeremiah's frown faded and a blank look stole over his lean face.

"Think nothing of it," he muttered. "Very well," he said dully. Turning, he strode away, his face as empty and expressionless as an idiot.

Mortimer sagged into his chair, his breath whistling through his teeth like steam from a leaky radiator. This was too much. He wiped the perspiration from his brow with a shaky hand. He, Mortimer Meek, had cowed the boss, Jeremiah Judson.

Why . . . why, anything was possible now. If his will power had been developed to the extent that he could bluff a hard, flinty-eyed old warrior like Jeremiah Judson . . . then he could do anything with it. Nothing was impossible!

Judson was halfway across the office by the time Mortimer reached this conclusion. Intoxicated by the sudden surge of power that swept over him, he sprang to his feet, squared his shoulders.

"Mr. . . . *Judson,*" he shouted, come back here."

Jeremiah Judson stopped in his tracks and then turned, the expression of a sleep walker stealing over his face.

"Yes . . . y . . . yes, sir," he stammered, hurrying to Mortimer's desk.

Mortimer felt a moment of panic. Maybe he had gone too far. But it was too late to stop now. He had to carry the thing off.

"Judson," he said loudly, "I'm not at all satisfied with my present salary. If you aren't in a position to pay me what I'm worth I shall be forced to tender my resignation. Effective immediately."

"How . . . how much do you want?" Judson gasped weakly.

MORTIMER staggered back, his brain reeling. He tried twice to speak, but he succeeded only in producing an incoherent squawk. This was incredible—but it was happening. Judson was waiting patiently, meekly, for his answer.

Mortimer started to ask for two dollars, but suddenly a wild, rash confidence took hold of his tongue.

"Four dollars," he stated. "Four dollars a week."

"Yes, sir," Mr. Judson even bowed slightly. "That will be arranged. Is that all?"

"No, it isn't," Mortimer snapped. Gone was his hesitation, his timidity, his lack of confidence. Mortimer Meek had arrived.

He swept a majestic eye over the awed and open-mouthed employees who were regarding the scene. He turned back to Jeremiah Judson.

"I want you to give every one of your employees a two-dollar-a-week raise. And," he waggled a stern finger under Jeremiah's nose, "this slave driving nonsense is a thing of the past. Get me?"

Mr. Judson mopped his perspiring forehead.

"Yes, sir," he managed to squeak. "Two dollars a week for everybody."

"And another thing," Mortimer said reflectively, "I don't particularly like the position of my desk. There's not enough light for one thing, and on top of that, it's dusty as the dickens. It's bad for my hay fever. Let's see," he looked critically about the office, "I

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think you'd better have it moved over there next to the window."

"But that's where Mr. Debaere's desk is," Judson's voice was incredulously horrified.

Mortimer smiled maliciously. Mr. Debaere was out to lunch with Betty, his girl. Probably sitting across from her right this minute in some dimly lighted cocktail bar.

"That's a pity, isn't it?" he said casually. "Nothing to do but put Mr. Debaere's desk where mine is. He hasn't got hay fever. He won't mind it."

"Yes, sir," Judson said helplessly. "I'll have the maintenance department take care of it right away."

"That's a good fellow," Mortimer said. "Snap into it."

"Yes, sir," Judson bowed again and scurried away.

A few minutes later he was back with two husky laborers trailing in his wake. Mortimer took charge of things.

"Move that desk away from the window," he ordered, "and we'll shove mine right in its place."

The two laborers nodded, moved to follow Mortimer's instructions.

Mortimer watched them clear the papers off the desk with a happy, gratified smile. At last one of his long-sought dreams was about to be realized. The laborers carried the desk to the middle of the office and then one of them turned a flushed, perspiring face to Mortimer.

"Where to now, bud?" he gasped.

"Set my desk down," a voice cried.

The words, angry and loud, had not issued from Mortimer. He looked up to meet the indignant gaze of Jon Debaere, who stood inside the office door, his face mottled with fury. With him was Betty.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted, advancing on the laborers. "Who gave orders to move my desk?"

Mortimer coughed.

"I did," he said.

"You?" Jon cried unbelievingly. "Who do you think you are?"

Mortimer threw back his head defiantly and raised an arm dramatically over his head.

"Hah," he cried. "I am Mortimer Meek."

"So what?" Jon snapped. "I'm telling you, Meek, you're liable to get yourself into a mess you hadn't figured on."

"Ain't it de truth?" a horribly familiar voice rasped in Mortimer's ear.

A CLAMMY, cold sweat broke out on Mortimer's brow and his thin hair tried to stand up and walk away. He didn't need to look around to know that the voice belonged to Slug McNutty the gangster any more than a man has to look around to know that he has been slugged in the head with a baseball bat.

It *was* Slug McNutty, accompanied by a dark, dapper little man, carrying a violin case under his arm.

"Didja tink over dat little deal," McNutty snapped, "or are you still goin' to play dumb?"

Mortimer felt Betty's hand tugging at his sleeve.

"Who are they?" she whispered. "They . . . they look dangerous."

"Don't worry," Mortimer heard Jon's voice in the background. "They're just a couple of his cheap friends. I'll take care of you, darling, never fear."

"How about it, chum?" McNutty's voice was ominously impatient. "Are ya ready to spill?"

"I have to settle one thing at a time," Mortimer cried. "Don't rush me."

He glared wildly about from one couple to the other. Here were all his troubles, concentrated and localized, dumped suddenly onto his neck. This,

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he knew, was his Thermopylae. If he failed now everything was lost. He clenched his fists and jerked himself up to his full height. He recalled fleetingly the comforting words of the book:

In times of great stress, when the outlook is darkest, strike with the cunning of the fox; the strength of the lion; the savageness of the tiger, and the battle is won.

It was a large order for Mortimer, who had spent but one afternoon in the city zoo in his life, but it was now or never, and Mortimer's soul was rising to the occasion. He cleared his throat and opened his mouth.

"Looks like a hooked bass, doesn't he?" Jon cut in maliciously.

The impatience, the humiliation, the anger that had bubbled in the crucible of Mortimer's soul, frothed over at this last slur.

"Oh!" he exploded. "Go . . . go to blazes!"

He wheeled to the grim figures of the gangsters, his head snapping back in a defiant tilt, his features cold and stern.

"Now," he snapped belligerently, "what the hell are you thugs hanging around here for?"

"Don't get tough," McNutty whispered menacingly. "You know what I want. Where's dat truck goin' to be at t'ree o'clock tomorrow aftanoon?"

"It's going to be at Plaza and Fifth," Mortimer snapped, "but that information is never going to do you any good."

McNutty's companion glanced nervously about the office.

"I don't like it," he whined. "Dis guy sounds like he stooled. Let's get outa here."

"You little rat," McNutty snapped at Mortimer. "Did ya tip the coppers off?"

Mortimer threw back his head and laughed loudly. He had seen this gesture used innumerable times in the movies and he had longed secretly for an opportunity to use it himself. He threw back his head and laughed again.

"You flatter yourself," he sneered. "I don't need the police to attend to the likes of you. You cheap cads have met your match in Mortimer Meek." Drawing himself up he launched into the finale of the bridge scene, chapter twelve, page 443. "Because you are powerless to resist my commands. Do you hear? Helpless!"

It was at this point that Jeremiah Judson chose to inject himself into the scene.

"What do you men want?" he cried, waving his arms at the gangsters. "What's the idea of standing around my office like a pair of . . . of gangsters?"

Mortimer experienced a pang of jealousy. What did Judson mean stealing the spotlight from him that way? His voice had a distinctly frozen edge as he said:

"I'll take care of things, Jerry, just—"

"But I demand to know," Judson interrupted, "what—"

"Oh, shut up," Mortimer cut him off exasperatedly. "Go climb a flagpole, you old fossil, and I'll take care of these crooks. These cheap hoodlums have met their match in—"

Two things cut off Mortimer's harangue.

One was Betty's shrill scream and the second was the beefy fist of Slug McNutty crashing into the side of his head.

MORTIMER hit the floor and bounced twice before he settled for good on the back of his neck, his fingers and legs twitching spasmodically.

"Mortimer," Betty screamed. "Mortimer."

Dimly Mortimer heard the clamor in

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the office, the shrill cries of the women, the rasping voice of Slug McNutty.

"Don't anybody make a move," he heard him yell. "Spike, get out the chopper. We'll shoot our way outa here."

And then he felt soft, cool hands on his face and heard Betty's anguished voice in his ear.

"Mortimer, darling," she moaned, "you're hurt, bleeding."

Mortimer felt a surge of returning confidence.

"Hah," he said thickly. "What's a little blood to Mortimer the mighty?"

He struggled to his knees but Betty pulled him back. "Don't," she begged. "You'll be killed."

"So what?" Mortimer snarled for the first time in his life. "So what?" His courage returned with a rush as the defiant phrase rolled off his tongue. He pulled free from Betty's grip and struggled to his feet, his lackluster eyes trying hard to flash commandingly.

The situation was one that would ordinarily call for a riot squad, tear gas and a dozen or so husky cops.

Slug McNutty was backing toward the door, a heavy automatic clenched in his right fist. His companion had unsnapped the violin case and dragged out a stubby, vicious looking tommy gun, which he pointed menacingly at the huddled group of frightened employees.

"Stop," Mortimer cried, advancing toward them. "Stop, you . . . you thugs."

The tommy gun swung around, its black barrel aiming at Mortimer's midsection and Slug McNutty's finger tightened on the trigger of the automatic.

"You're beggin' for dis," McNutty rapped.

"Drop those guns," Mortimer cried desperately. "Drop them, I say."

An instant later, to the astonishment of Mortimer and the terrified employees, the gangsters released their grip on the guns and let them drop with a clattering crash to the floor.

An awed, incredulous murmur rose from the trembling office workers as the gangsters stared helplessly down at their guns and then looked dumbly and dazedly to Mortimer.

It was a sweet, soul-satisfying moment for Mortimer. He filled his lungs and swept a triumphant gaze over the breathlessly silent office.

"That's better," he said, trying to keep his voice from cracking with relief. "Much better." He turned to the white and shaking figure of Jeremiah Judson. "Nothing to worry about now, Jerry," he said loftily. "I have things under control."

"Oh, Mortimer," breathed Betty. "You're . . . you're wonderful!"

"Sure I am," Mortimer agreed. "The dominant type."

He turned back to the gangsters, his features hardening, his head snapping back defiantly.

"Come here," he cried, in a tone of voice that sounded like the bark of an anemic pekinese. "Come here, and make it snappy."

The gangsters obeyed numbly, their eyes staring glassily.

"Now get this," Mortimer said when they cowered before him. "I'm not going to be hard on you fellows. You don't deserve any mercy, but I think you've learned the futility of crossing swords with Mortimer Meek."

"Jeez," said Slug McNutty humbly, "ya mean ya ain't goin' to turn us over to de cops?"

"No," said Mortimer, "I'm not. You've learned your lesson." He paused, delighted with his new role of kindly benevolence. "If you ever need any advice or inspiration feel free to call on me. Now go on about your busi-

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ness, like real men."

"Jeez," said Slug McNutty. "We sure will."

TWENTY seconds after the door had closed upon the sheepish exit of the gangsters, a mild sort of pandemonium broke loose. The employees surged about Mortimer, pumping his hand, slapping his back, almost tearful in their relief and happiness. But Mortimer heard only one voice, saw only one face.

"Oh, darling," Betty was crying, "I've been such a fool."

The words trickled over Mortimer like cool water on a parched plain. He looked about for Jon, his erstwhile rival, but he was nowhere to be seen.

But he did see something that made him start like a prodded horse.

The metal door that led to the incinerator chute was swinging gently, and caught on an edge of metal was a piece of light gray cloth; light gray cloth of the same shade as the suit that Jon had been wearing.

"I don't know where Jon went," Betty rushed on, "and I don't care. He certainly got out of here in a hurry when he saw those guns."

Mortimer heard the sound of Betty's voice but the words were not registering. He was looking at the piece of cloth with horrified eyes while his brain recalled the last thing he had said to Jon.

Go to blazes, that's what he had told him. The incinerator chute led to the furnace. Could it be . . . had Jon, impelled by his powerful will, taken the command literally? The evidence pointed that way.

He remembered with a feeling of relief that it was summer—there was no fire in the furnace. At least he hoped there wasn't.

"He certainly proved himself a coward," Betty said indignantly, "when things got too hot for him."

"I hope they haven't by now," Mortimer answered.

"Oh, you were splendid," Betty rushed on. "The way you bluffed those gangsters was the most thrilling thing I've ever seen."

Mortimer held up a deprecating hand and smiled modestly.

"A little firmness now and then," he said, "is useful."

"But the most wonderful thing of all," Betty gushed, "was the charitable way you gave them another chance and then calmly told them to go on about their business. That was big of you, Mortimer."

"I didn't want to be too hard . . ." Mortimer's voice choked off as his heart began to tumble around like an egg in boiling water. A phrase of Betty's had suddenly leaped across his brain, glaring like a bright neon sign.

Told them to go about their business!

The words sprang before his eyes in letters a foot high. That's what he'd told the gangsters to do, to go on about their business. And the business of the gangsters had been to rob the special truck. He had told them, commanded them with his new, powerful will to hijack the armored truck!

"What's the matter?" Betty asked solicitously. "You look ill, Mortimer."

"This is terrible," Mortimer babbled excitedly. "The gangsters . . . they're going to rob the truck. I told them to. They can't help themselves."

"Now, now," Betty said soothingly, "you're just overwrought. You're suffering a reaction from the nervous excitement."

"But you don't understand," Mortimer cried wildly. "The truck . . . I told them to rob it! That's their *business*. I told them to *do* it."

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"You told them nothing of the sort," Betty scoffed. "Those men were thoroughly cowed when you got through with them. They won't cause anyone trouble."

"That's what you think," Mortimer yelled. He felt his courage rising again to meet this emergency. He remembered that he had boastingly named the intersection where the truck would be. He'd have to hurry to stop them. Breaking free from Betty's restraining hand he strode across the office and wheeled dramatically to face the bewildered circle of employees.

"Never fear," he cried, raising one arm triumphantly above his head, "Mortimer Meek will take care of things." With a final dramatic wave of his hand he turned and raced down the corridor to the elevator. . .

DASHING out of the lobby of the building he wheeled and streaked down the street like Equipoise after a sack of oats. He was secretly glad that another chance to demonstrate his will power had presented itself.

"Good practice for me," he panted as he scurried along. Oblivious to his surroundings he pelted down the street turning over in his mind the most dramatic way to rout the gangsters.

He had just decided to order them to march away from the scene single file, when he remembered something. Something that acted as a brake on his driving legs and slowed him down to a walk.

He had just remembered that the robbery was scheduled for the following day.

Feeling slightly foolish he came to a stop, his sides heaving from the unaccustomed exertion. He stood scratching his head for a minute before he decided upon a course of action. Why, it was simple. He'd go to police headquarters, at the City Hall, and explain the situation to them. They'd take care of it for him. No sense in him going to all that trouble of stopping the robbery when they were being paid to do it.

Silently congratulating himself on his keenness he started walking again, hurrying in the direction of the City Hall.

It was not until he turned the block leading to the entrance of the City Hall that Mortimer became aware of the hurrying streams of humanity that were excitedly rushing in the same direction.

Strangely enough, they were all peering up at the sky, shading their eyes with the backs of their hands.

Mortimer looked up and saw nothing, not even a cloud in the sky.

Dropping his gaze, he hurried along through the thickening crowd. Using his elbows and knees, he plowed ahead until finally his way was blocked by a solid, unyielding mass of humanity that stretched from sidewalk to sidewalk, completely closing off the street.

"What's it all about?" Mortimer muttered bewilderedly.

"Ten cents a look," a harsh voice twanged behind him. "Ten cents for a look at the madman. Can't climb any higher. Won't come down. Take a look while there's still time. He may jump any minute."

Mortimer looked around and saw a dark, monkey-like little man standing next to a telescope mounted on a tripod.

A crudely lettered tin sign reading SEE MARS FOR A NICKEL dangled from the telescope.

"Ten cents a look," the little man was intoning. "Take a look before he jumps. While there's still time. Don't miss the chance of a lifetime."

Entranced, Mortimer moved closer, fumbling for a dime.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

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"Man on the flagpole of City Hall," the pitch man answered laconically. "Probably some nut."

Excited, Mortimer paid the man a dime and squatted behind the telescope, placing his eye to the barrel. He swung the 'scope up the brown facade of the Hall, past the top ramparts, and then tilted it until it focused on the flagpole.

Sure enough, right at the top of the pole he could see the enlarged figure of a man, clutching desperately to the slender swaying flagstaff.

"Gosh!" said Mortimer.

He tilted the 'scope and then the man's face was visible—and the breath left Mortimer's lungs with an incredulous *whoooosh.*

For the bewildered, dazed, pathetic face that focused in the telescope was that of Jeremiah Judson!

FOR a dizzy second Mortimer's head reeled and then with sickening force he recalled the exasperated command he had hurled at Judson when the gangsters were in the office. Go climb a flagpole, that's what he'd told him. And that's just what Jeremiah had done.

"This is terrible," Mortimer cried. "I've got to tell him to come down before he falls and is killed. I've got to get through."

"No soap, Buddy," the man next to him said. "The cops have got the crowd roped off. They've got a net spread for him. Not a chance in a million to get through."

But Mortimer had not waited to hear the last. Kicking and scratching, he plunged through the mob, his breath searing his lungs like a blast from a furnace.

"I've got to get through," he yelled. "I know him. I've got to get through."

The crowd parted unwillingly with angry mutterings and Mortimer plunged on like a miniature broncho until he collided with a broad, blue-clad back.

"Aisy now," a heavy voice growled, a foot or so above his head. "We got one nut to watch wit'out bein' bothered by the likes of you. Get back there now."

"But I tell you I know him," Mortimer pleaded hysterically. Furiously, but futilely, he struggled against the hands that held him.

"Get back there," the policeman roared. "I'm not foolin' wit' you."

He placed both hands on Mortimer's chest and pushed, suddenly and heavily.

Mortimer staggered backwards, tripped on a loose stone and sprawled to the street, landing in a pool of murky, dirty water.

Tears of humiliation blinded him as he struggled to his feet, water dripping from his clothes. "Who do you think you're shovin' around?" he cried angrily.

"Sure and maybe it's Napoleon Boneyparty," the policeman sneered sarcastically. "Or maybe just the King of England."

"It's Mortimer Meek," Mortimer cried, "and I'm telling you to clear out of my way."

The policeman's huge fists doubled menacingly, but then he began to tremble.

"Go right ahead, sir," he quaked, backing fearfully away.

Mortimer ducked past him, raced across the street and up the steps of the City Hall.

"Let me by," he shouted at the officer who was guarding the doors. Instantly the doors were jerked open by the dazedly obedient guard and Mortimer dashed into the interior of the building.

A fat, red-faced little man was standing in the middle of a group, moaning and wringing his hands.

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"A week before election it's gotta happen," he groaned. "It couldn't be a week after, oh no. This is terrible publicity. The papers will say he jumped in protest against my taxes. This is terrible."

Mortimer recognized the Mayor from the pictures in the paper. He made a beeline for him and grabbed him by the arm.

"Listen," he cried urgently. "I can get that man down if you'll take me up to the roof of the building."

The Mayor looked at him sourly.

"What makes you think you can," he asked, "when all the cops in town have failed?"

"Take it or leave it," Mortimer snapped. "I'm telling you I can get him down."

The Mayor hesitated for an instant, then he snapped his fingers.

"I'll give you a chance," he snapped. "You can't be any worse than these police have been."

AN express elevator whisked them to the roof. There Mortimer saw fifty or sixty policemen, sergeants, captains, lieutenants crowded about the base of the flags pole shouting and gesticulating at the figure fifty feet above their heads.

"It's no use," one of them cried as the Mayor bustled out of the elevator. "The nut won't come down. If we climb after him, he's liable to jump."

Mortimer stepped out of the elevator after the Mayor. "I'll get him down," he said confidently. "Just watch."

"What are you goin' to do?" a captain asked suspiciously. "Put salt on his tail?"

"No," Mortimer said calmly. "I'm just going to tell him to come down."

"What?" yelled the Mayor. "I thought you had some plan, something in the way of strategy. If this is a gag, you'll find out it isn't funny!"

Mortimer favored him with a cold look and then strode to the base of the slender, swaying flagpole. He looked up its shining length to the pitiful, huddled figure that had clamped itself to the top of the pole. He turned to the crowd of officers and officials.

"Please," he yelled. "Be quiet. I must have silence."

The murmuring talk died away until the only sound on the top of the roof was the wind whistling past the flagpole.

Again Mortimer looked up the pole at Jeremiah Judson and then he cupped his hands over his mouth.

"Jeremiah," he shouted. "Can you hear me?"

A second later a quivering affirmative floated down to the tense crowd on the roof.

Mortimer paused, stared dramatically around the silent, breathless circle of spectators and then looked back up the pole.

"Okay, then," he yelled. "Come on down."

IN the Mayor's office a congratulatory, back-slapping crowd surged around Mortimer. Flash bulbs popped in his face and reporters with greedy notebooks shot questions at him.

"How'd you get him to come down," one of them asked, "when all the efforts of the police had failed?"

"I just asked him to," Mortimer replied nonchalantly and then he added maliciously: "That's the one thing the police forgot to do."

"What a story! What a story!" the newshawk chortled happily. "Fire hoses, safety nets, police cordon fail but polite request turns trick. It's headlines for you, buddy."

Mortimer felt a light tap on his shoulder and he turned to face an alert looking, well dressed young man who grabbed Mortimer's hand and pumped

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it enthusiastically.

"Name's Blake, Terry Blake," the young man said. "Represent the Me, John Public, radio show. You've heard it. Odd slants on the day's news. Now I wonder if you'd do us a favor and make an appearance on tomorrow's show and tell the radio audience about your experience here today?"

"Oh it wasn't that important," Mortimer began but the other chopped him off.

"Yes it was. That's the kind of stuff that John Public eats up. Now will you do it? There'll be a nice check in it for you."

"Well," Mortimer prolonged the delightful conversation, "what time is the show?"

"Two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Can I expect you?"

"Well," Mortimer tried to sound as if he were weighing factors, "I think I can make it. As you say the public enjoys that type of thing. Makes it sort of a duty, doesn't it?"

"Right you are," the affable young man agreed. "Two o'clock, don't forget. I'll be looking for you."

It was quite a time after he disappeared before Mortimer was able to break away from the enthusiastic crowd and get to the corridor.

And it was then and only then that he remembered the business that had brought him to the City Hall in the first place.

The robbery. The robbery of the delivery truck that was scheduled to take place the following day.

"Gosh," he muttered to himself. "Be too bad if I forgot that."

Peering about, he saw a door lettered CHIEF OF POLICE and turned his steps in that direction.

"They can take care of it," he thought. "I'll be too busy. I'm going on the air tomorrow."

"—AND NOW, ladies and gentlemen, it is the privilege of the Quiscuit Biscuit Company to present to you at this time a man whose name has been blazoned across the headlines for the last twenty-four hours."

Mortimer clutched his speech nervously as the announcer approached the climax of the introduction. He smiled wanly at Betty who stood next to him gripping his arm tightly.

"Are you nervous, dear?" she asked worriedly.

"N . . not at all," Mortimer lied. "It's just that . . . it's just that it's a little close in here, that's all."

"And now," the announcer signalled Mortimer with his hand, "you will hear Mortimer Meek tell you in his own words the thrilling story that has captured the imagination of the country overnight. Quiscuit Biscuit takes pleasure in presenting, Me, John Public's Man of the Minute—Mortimer Meek!"

Mortimer walked to the "mike" on knees that shook and wobbled painfully. He swallowed nervously and then he felt a draft on his neck.

He risked a quick peek over his shoulder and saw that Betty had raised one of the windows. A refreshing breeze was wafting through the studio.

He smiled fleetingly at her and then turned back to the "mike" clearing his throat.

"Go on," the announcer whispered. "You're on the air."

Mortimer rallied his courage and set his feet firmly as if he were preparing to take a swing with a golf club.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he read, "my name is Mortimer Meek. I was walking downtown yesterday afternoon when suddenly—"

An eddying gust of wind whistled through the studio and Mortimer paused to push the hair out of his eyes.

"When suddenly," he struggled on

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again, "I noticed a crowd—" He stopped again as another burst of wind rattled the papers in his hand. He tried desperately to get a firmer grip on the paper and then it happened.

His sweaty fingers slipped on the smooth paper and the next instant his speech was flying across the room, twisting and twirling like a leaf in a gale.

Mortimer started after it but the announcer jerked him back.

"You're on the air," he hissed. "Keep talking."

Mortimer stared in terror at the "mike."

"Hello," he gulped inanely. "I didn't do anything much . . . that is . . . I mean, I didn't think it was much but I suppose you people want to hear about it anyway. The radio executive was telling me how foolish you people are about things like that." Mortimer paused and looked desperately about the studio. The announcer and two control men were still chasing after his speech.

"What I mean," he floundered on, "is that it wasn't much of a job for me. As a matter of fact the biggest job I had was to convince the police to let me through so I could get the man down. You know the police in this town are not as bright as they might be." Mortimer remembered the policeman who had shoved him into the puddle and warmed to his subject.

"We'd get along a lot better if all the dumb, incompetent policemen listening to this program would go and take a two week vacation for themselves. What this city needs—"

A STRONG hand grabbed Mortimer's shoulder, jerked him away from the "mike." Then the announcer was saying breathlessly:

"Due to circumstances beyond our control we will be unable to give you the rest of this broadcast. A transcribed organ solo will follow."

The announcer switched off the "mike" and wheeled to Mortimer.

"You can't say things like that," he cried wildly. "It's slander. The Federal Commission may jerk our license for this."

"But it's true," Mortimer insisted weakly. "The police *are* incompetent."

"Oooh," the announcer groaned. "That doesn't make any difference. This is terrible."

Mortimer felt Betty tugging at his sleeve.

"We'd better be going dear," she said. "That's the thanks you get for trying to help your old city. They just don't appreciate it."

Mortimer felt slightly better. "I guess you're right," he said in a voice dripping with self pity. "I'm just a martyr, that's all. Just a martyr."

Outside in the hallway leading to the elevators Mortimer almost bumped into a large, red faced policeman who was hurrying by.

"Sorry, fella," the cop yelled over his shoulder, "I'm just starting on my vacation and I'm in a little hurry."

Slightly puzzled, Mortimer followed him to the elevator and crowded in behind him.

At the first stop three more policemen pushed into the car.

"I'm heading for the lakes," he heard one of them say. "I'm really going to enjoy myself this vacation."

The others laughed heartily and slapped him on the back.

"So are we," one of them chuckled. "I can't wait till I get the old fish pole in my hands."

Mortimer cowered in the back of the elevator, a strange, wild premonition chilling his spine. Maybe it was a coincidence—maybe . . .

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The elevator stopped and Mortimer dashed out of the cage and raced through the lobby to the street.

And then—his premonition became a horrible reality as he stared at the chaos and confusion that greeted his eyes.

Policemen were walking arm in arm, laughing merrily at the snarled traffic, at the bewildered, panic-stricken pedestrians.

A mounted policeman galloped through the street, waving his cap over his head.

"Hiyo, Silver," he bellowed. "Awaaay. Awaaaay for a vacation. Gang Awaaaay!"

Dimly, through the fog of terror that swept over him, Mortimer realized that Betty was screaming in his ear.

"Mortimer," her voice was edged with panic. "What's happened? All these policemen are deserting their posts. They've gone crazy. What does it mean?"

"They're going on vacations," Mortimer whispered hoarsely. "They're going on vacations because I told them to."

"Oh nonsense," Betty exclaimed. "If you're thinking about what you said on the radio—why that's absurd. And besides," she concluded triumphantly, "you distinctly said that only the incompetent policemen should take a vacation."

"But don't you see," Mortimer cried hysterically, "that's just it. They're all incompetent. They're all leaving."

He stared wildly about at the milling crowds, at the jammed traffic. Then his eyes flicked past a clock and subconsciously registered the time.

Two thirty! Suddenly, with the force of a pile driver, a terrible realization crashed into his consciousness.

Two thirty! In a half hour the gangsters would be hijacking the armored delivery truck. There was nothing and no one to stop them. The police, in response to Mortimer's thoughtless command, were deserting their posts in droves.

It took Mortimer several long seconds to recover from the shock, but when he did his head snapped back defiantly. Gangsters ready to strike; police nowhere in sight.

It was Mortimer Meek to the rescue.

"Betty," he grabbed her by the arm, "Wait here for me. I've got a little job to take care of."

"Darling," there was a note of alarm in her voice, "where are you going?"

But Mortimer was already streaking away to keep his date with Destiny . . .

MORTIMER heard the brisk, chilling rattle of machine gun fire before he reached the intersection of Plaza and Fifth. The thought that he might be too late acted as a spur in his flank, driving him on at a breathless, increased speed.

He heard a shout, a scream and then as he rounded the corner the scene was suddenly spread before him.

Gangsters were swarming about the wrecked delivery truck, menacing the bystanders and armored truck drivers with machine guns. A moving van had been backed up to the delivery truck and Mortimer saw then that the rear doors of the armored truck had been forced open. A familiar, bulky, loudly dressed figure was clambering into the armored truck, a heavy automatic in his fist. Slug McNutty.

And a second after Slug McNutty's figure had disappeared into the interior of the truck, a heavily stuffed money bag came flying out, to vanish through the open doors and into the bowels of the waiting van.

In this crisis Mortimer was calm. He squared his shoulders, tilted his head defiantly and then charged into the

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middle of the street.

"Stop," he cried. "Stop. It is I, Mortimer Meek, who commands it."

His sudden, surprising arrival checked the gangsters. Their muzzles dropped uncertainly as Mortimer looked about sternly.

"Now," said Mortimer. He stepped between the two trucks and just at that instant a heavy currency sack hurtled through the air. It struck him at the base of the neck with a stunning paralyzing blow that ignited a sparkling constellation of stars in his head, and then knocked him flat on his face.

Mortimer didn't hear the excited exclamation that ripped from the lips of the gangster, nor did he see the figure of Slug McNutty clamber down from the back of the truck.

"Cripes," gasped McNutty, "it's de little shrimp from de Loan Company. Here," he yelled to one of the gangsters, "gimme a lift wit dis guy. We can't leave him here, he'd tip the cops for sure."

Strong hands lifted Mortimer's limp figure and tossed it into the van on top of the currency sacks.

"Let's get rollin'," McNutty snapped, "before som'thin' else happens."

The words had hardly passed his lips before something else did happen.

Something in the form of a clawing, scratching, dark-haired bundle of feminine fury that launched itself at Slug McNutty like an angry tigress.

"Mortimer," the dark-haired girl screamed. "What have you done with him?"

McNutty wheeled, yowling as long red fingernails raked the back of his neck. Twisting he grabbed the squirming, kicking girl and hoisted her onto his shoulder.

"Open de doors of de van," he yelled, "it's de little guy's dame, we gotta take her wit' us too."

The doors swung open, McNutty dumped his struggling burden into the van, the doors swung shut, a padlock snapped.

"Come on," shouted McNutty. "The bulls will be along any minute. We'll take care of dese two when we get to de hideout."

MORTIMER climbed wearily through thick clouds of fog and opened his eyes to see Betty looking down at him a tender, worried expression on her face.

"Betty," he gasped weakly. "Where are we? How did you . . . ?"

He started to rise, but sagged back groaning as a thousand hammers started to pound in his skull.

"Oh Mortimer," Betty groaned. "We're in terrible trouble. The gangsters brought us here to this little farm house about twenty miles from the city. I heard them say it's a hideout."

"But how did they get you?" Mortimer asked dazedly.

"I followed you," Betty said. "I suppose it was foolish, but I had some strange feeling that you were going into danger and I wanted to be with you. The gangsters grabbed me, threw me in the truck and that's where I found you. You've been unconscious for three hours. You must have had a terrible fight with them."

"Three of them," Mortimer said, "jumped me from behind."

He climbed to his feet, disregarding the pain in his head.

"But they won't get away with this," he cried. "I am Mortimer Meek. I'll show them they're playing with dynamite."

"Oh Mortimer," Betty said ecstatically. "When you scowl like that it sends chills up my spine. You're wonderful."

Mortimer squared his shoulders. He

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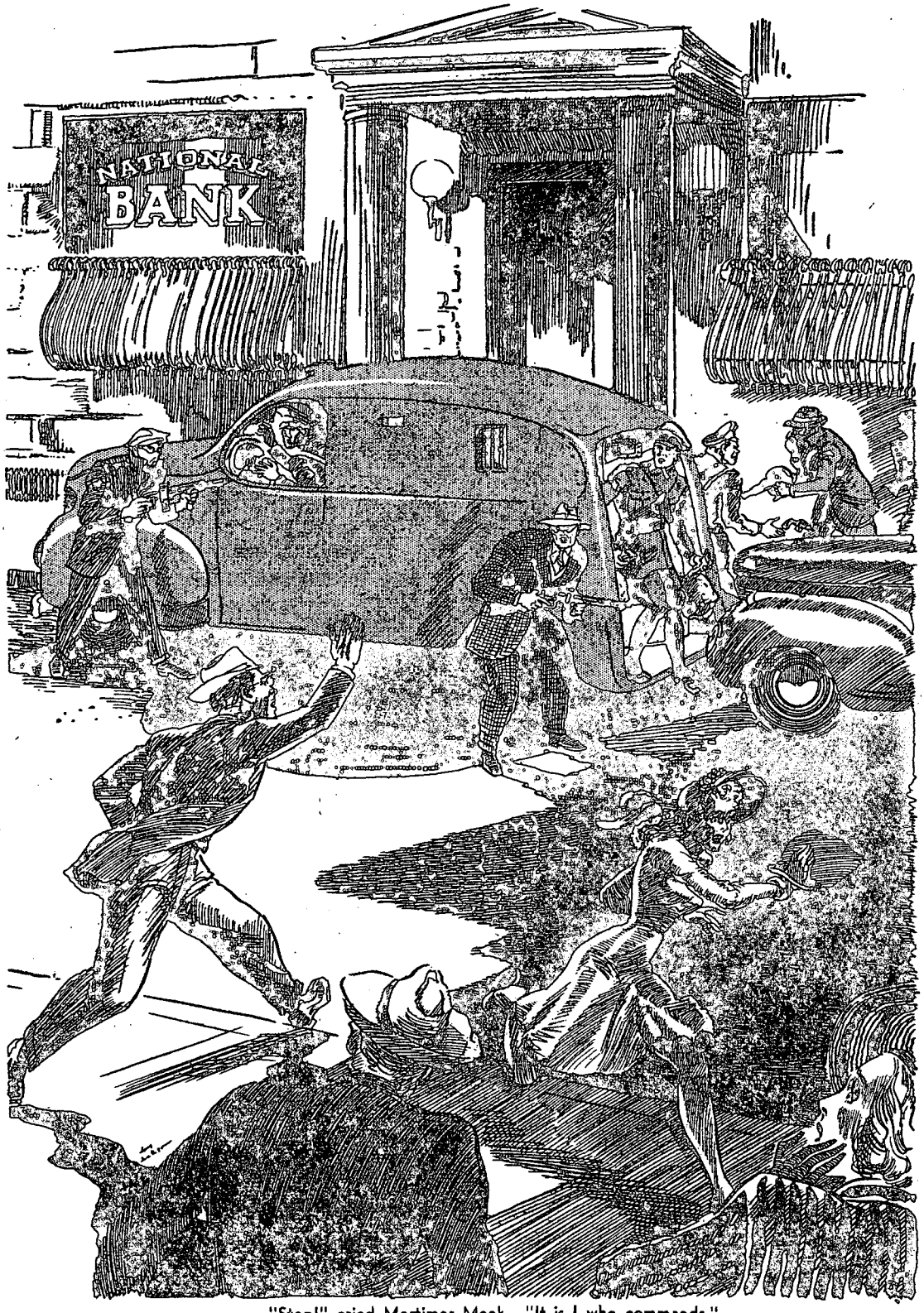

"Stop!" cried Mortimer Meek. "It is I who commands."

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hadn't had a chance to display his will power at the robbery but he'd make up for it now.

Striding to the door, he pounded on it with both fists.

"Come in here," he shouted, "and make it snappy."

There was a moment's silence and then a slightly bewildered nasal voice answered.

"Okay buddy, we'll make it snappy for you."

Mortimer turned to Betty, his chest swelling proudly.

"Did you hear that," he asked happily. "I've got 'em on the run."

A bolt and chain rattled and then the door swung inward and a wedge of light slanted into the room. A second later the large bulk of Slug McNutty moved into the room.

Mortimer paused and sneered at the burly gangster. He searched his brain for the most humiliating command that he could think of. They wouldn't dare bother him again. He opened his mouth —but he was too late.

Slug McNutty's beefy hand flashed out and clamped over Mortimer's mouth.

"Yer talkin' too much," he grated. "There's somethin' funny about de way you order people around. We're goin' to fix ya so ya ain't so gabby."

Mortimer squirmed helplessly. The gangster's heavy hand clamped over his mouth and nose almost strangling him.

"Glug," he mumbled desperately.

McNutty twisted his arms behind his back and then propelled him through the door, slamming it behind him on Betty's whimpering protests.

MORTIMER gazed frantically about the room, at the five or six hard bitten thugs who leered at him.

"Get them leather thongs," McNutty snapped. "I'm goin' to fix dis punk so's he'll stay quiet."

One of the gangsters walked to a closet and returned carrying four or five hide strips which he tossed to Slug McNutty.

The hand over Mortimer's mouth was suddenly removed. But before he could shout the commands that would save him, a leather thong was shoved between his teeth and jerked tight. The strap cut into his lips and cheeks as McNutty wound it through his mouth to the back of his neck, again and again.

Mortimer struggled desperately and frantically. If he couldn't talk he was helpless. He managed somehow to squirm around in the gangsters grasp and then with all of his strength he pounded his fists into McNutty's face.

"You little rat," McNutty snarled. He tied a last knot in the leather gag and then his fist lashed out and exploded with a solid, stunning smack on Mortimer's jaw.

Mortimer flew backward, crashed into a table and slid to the floor. His hands tore helplessly and futilely at the gag in his mouth, as he squirmed around on the floor.

He had to get the gag out of his mouth. If he couldn't, gone was any chance of saving Betty or himself.

He didn't see the kick that McNutty directed against his threshing figure. His first knowledge of it came when it crashed into his posterior anatomy. Under its impetus he slid along the floor and rolled under the table. His hands encountered something cold and hard and with the dazed idea of using whatever it was as a club, he clutched it to his chest.

"Kick the table over," he heard a voice shout. "I ain't through with the little punk yet."

A heavy foot struck the table and the next instant Mortimer's huddled figure was exposed to the gangsters.

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"I'll get him," a heavy voice yelled, but the words were almost drowned out in the shrill scream of terror that blasted through the room.

"Look out," a voice screamed. "He's got the tommy gun!"

Mortimer clambered to his feet and there was a wild scurrying of bodies as the gangsters hurled themselves from his path.

Mortimer took advantage of the momentary opportunity to tug desperately at the leather straps that were almost strangling him. But it was no use. Slug McNutty had done his work well. The gag held. It was only then that he became conscious of the instrument of destruction he held tightly clutched in his hand.

Mortimer knew just as much about intricate machine guns as the average Zulu tribesman.

He peered uncertainly at the weapon and then he tucked it under his arm and raced out the door. He knew that he wouldn't have time to stand there and figure out how the gun worked. His only salvation was to get a few minutes of uninterrupted time in order to get the gag out of his mouth. Then he'd show 'em.

He clattered down the steps into the yard and a large red barn loomed before his eyes. With terror and hope guiding his steps he fled toward it in a crouching, bobbing run.

A shot *whisssshed* past his ear and he heard shouted cries behind him.

"Don't let him get away," a voice cried. "Keep him in sight."

The barn was large and dim and as Mortimer peered wildly about for some niche or cranny, he spied a ladder leading up to a loft.

And by the time the gangsters crept cautiously into the barn Mortimer had scrambled up the ladder and disappeared from sight.

IN the loft, like an hysterically scared ostrich, Mortimer burrowed deep into the hay until only the tip of his nose was visible. With one hand he worked furiously at the leather gag and with the other he clutched the gun to his chest as if it were a hungry baby.

"He's in here somewhere," he heard Slug McNutty's voice bellow. "Look in de stalls and den we'll try de hayloft."

Trembling with a strange mixture of terror and anger, Mortimer twisted to dig himself deeper into the hay, and as he did, his hand tightened involuntarily on the gun.

A metallic clatter ripped the silence and a stream of bullets shot by his nose and whistled into the hay.

There was a triumphant shout below him that sounded like the bay of a bloodhound to Mortimer. He hurled the gun from him and scrambled out of the hay, glaring wildly around for some place to flee.

There was none! The gangsters were below. The gag was still firmly in place. He was out of the frying pan into the fire.

Fire! What had made him think . . . ?

He sniffed curiously and then with horror as the burning odor of pungent hay stung his nostrils. He wheeled to see tongues of flames leaping from the hay. Smoke was billowing up in great choking clouds as the fire licked its way greedily through the tinder-dry hay.

It must have been the sparks from the gun, he thought distractedly.

"Fire," he heard Slug McNutty shout. "Clear out. We can pick off the little guy as he tries to get down."

Mortimer backed away from the fire, his mind tossing about like a straw in a tornado. The gag was still cutting into his mouth, cutting off air. Almost choking as the bitter smoke burned into his lungs, he staggered across the

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floor, his eyes and hopes riveted on a small window through which smoke was spiralling. Sparks and embers were burning the back of his neck by the time he reached the wall and stuck his head out of the window.

Disregarding the fact that it was a fifty-foot drop to the ground, Mortimer clambered up the wall and hoisted himself onto the sill of the window. He looked down into a small fenced enclosure built against the barn evidently to save additional fencing. Tethered in the enclosure Mortimer noticed a large black cow pawing the earth and goring the air with huge, thick horns.

It was the first "cow" Mortimer had ever seen with horns, but then Mortimer had never seen many cows.

He was on the point of leaping when he noticed the lightning rod. It ran down the side of the barn about two feet from the window. Gathering his courage, he climbed to his feet and reached out and gripped the rod. He hadn't decided to slide down, but suddenly the decision was made for him. The window ledge gave way with a splintering crash and Mortimer swung crazily from the rod, one puny, rapidly weakening hand between himself and a fall to the ground.

He managed to get a grip with his other hand and then began a careful descent. He wondered where the gangsters were. If they were waiting for him on the opposite side of the barn he might be able—

"There he is. Hurry up."

The shout cut off his optimistic thoughts. Straining about he twisted his head for a look over his shoulder. Slug McNutty was unfastening the gate with one hand and waving excitedly with the other. Mortimer's hopes plummeted to his shoes as he saw the four remaining gangsters join McNutty at the gate.

Mortimer clung to the lighting rod, his soul in a tumult. His arms were strained and quivering with fatigue and the gag was swiftly strangling him. The fire was raging a few feet above his head and it would only be a matter of seconds before it was licking at his hands. He peered helplessly, despairingly over his shoulder. The gangsters were crossing the enclosure, guns drawn, greedy anticipation in their eyes.

"Glug, glug," groaned Mortimer. In the stress of the moment he clapped his hands to his head—and then as he started to fall, scratched furiously at the side of the barn. But it was too late. Mortimer was on the way down.

HE landed at the feet of Slug McNutty with a jarring bounce that deflated his lungs with a whooosh.

He felt himself jerked to his feet and when he opened his eyes he was looking into the black muzzle of Slug McNutty's automatic.

"Say yer prayers," McNutty grated. "You've caused us de last bit of trouble your goin' to." His finger tightened on the trigger—but just at that instant a strange noise sounded in their ears.

It was more than a noise. It was an enraged moose-like bellow that sounded like a cross between a hungry lion and a donkey with sinus trouble.

Mortimer's eyes strayed over McNutty's shoulder, focused on the source of the sound.

"Glug, glug," he attempted a warning.

McNutty wheeled, his eyes following the direction of Mortimer's gaze.

"It's a bull," he gasped. "A wild bull. He's ready to charge."

Mortimer's "cow" was pawing the earth furiously. Enraged by the humans, terrified by the sparks that fell on his back, he strained his massive bulk against the thin rope, his small

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red eyes gleaming viciously.

His mouth yawned open and his angry, terrifying bellow thundered through the air. His heavy shoulders lunged frantically against the thin rope. Another lunge and the rope snapped—sending him to his knees.

The gangsters fled, wild, hoarse screams of terror ripping from their throats, but Mortimer's nerve centers were paralyzed, refused to work. He stood rooted to the spot, powerless to move a muscle.

"Glug, glug," Mortimer croaked desperately. "Glug."

The bull glared at Mortimer and then at the fleeing gangsters. Whether he felt there wouldn't be much sport in goring Mortimer or whether he just liked to play the field will never be known, but at any rate, he wheeled and charged after the gangsters, his sharp, driving hooves kicking a spray of dust back into Mortimer's face.

The chains of paralysis were struck from Mortimer, and with a sobbing cry of thankfulness, he turned and raced around the corner of the barn and struck off across the yard, sprinting toward the highway.

This was his chance, his one, heaven-sent chance. He heard the gangsters shouting and yelling on the opposite side of the barn and he redoubled his efforts.

He had covered a good hundred yards before they spotted him again.

They had evidently managed to escape the bull, for as he glanced over his shoulder he saw two of them racing after him, brandishing their guns.

They were too late, he thought exultantly. With a hundred yard start they could never catch him before he reached the highway. There he could spot a car and—

Mortimer didn't see the well!

He didn't see it until he crashed into it—and then it was too late.

His hoarse desperate scream was choked back by the the leather gag that cut into his mouth. His hands clawed at the air as if they expected to find an invisible ladder there. And then his frantically twisting body plummeted into the depths of the well.

It struck the green, scummy water with a splash that sent geysers of water shooting back to the top of the well.

For a minute or so Mortimer was mercifully unconscious and then as reason began to filter back to his brain, he opened his eyes to find himself sitting in about eighteen inches of water.

"Well, well," Slug McNutty's unpleasant voice drifted down to him. "You saved us a lot of trouble, chum. We was wonderin' what to do wit' your body and what could be nicer than a nice private well?"

Mortimer peered fearfully up to the top of the well. Slug McNutty was gazing down at him and as he watched, the heads of the remaining gangsters appeared over the rim of the well.

"Let's let him have it," McNutty said with a wolfish grin. "At dis range we can't miss, can we boys?"

Five muzzles pointed down at Mortimer.

"Glug," he gasped. His mouth and eyes were full of water. "Glug," he gasped again and this time he felt something slip. The water soaked leather straps were stretching, giving, as Mortimer worked his jaws.

"Okay," McNutty's trigger finger clenched. "Let 'im. . . ."

"STOP! Stop!" Mortimer's voice, muffled and indistinct, reached the gangsters ears paralyzing them. "Stop. Put those guns down." Mortimer ripped the loosened thongs from his mouth and clambered to his feet. "Throw those guns away," he yelled, "and get a rope

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and get me out of here."

He stared commandingly, scornfully at them and then threw his head back defiantly.

"Make it snappy you hoodlums, before I lose my temper."

Mortimer Meek was back in the saddle.

Dripping, but masterful, he was hauled out of the well and deposited on the ground. Slug McNutty and his henchmen cowered before him, their faces stamped with a mask of bewilderment and obedience.

"You stupid, moronic thugs," Mortimer said icily, "have made your biggest and last mistake in matching wits with Mortimer Meek. Now . . ."

His eyes roved speiulatively over the farm house, the still smouldering barn, lighted on the well and stopped there. An expression of malicious amusement passed over his features.

"Now," he repeated, "you are going to pay for it. Climb down into this well. All of you."

"But jeez," Slug McNutty protested weakly, "it's dirty and cold and—"

"Get down in that well," Mortimer's shout cut him off. "And snap it up."

Without another word Slug McNutty stepped to the rim of the well, threw a leg over the stone embankment and plunged into its depths.

Mortimer looked meaningly at the other gangsters.

"You too," he snapped.

One by one they repeated McNutty's plunge until, vindicated and triumphant, Mortimer was left alone—master of all he surveyed.

He reveled in the heady, thrilling sensation of complete power until a cry disrupted his pleasant thoughts, jerked him around.

He saw Betty running toward him.

"Oh Mortimer," she sobbed as she threw herself into his arms. "You're not dead. You're not dead."

"Why not at all, not at all," Mortimer said blandly. "Whatever gave you the idea that I might be in trouble."

"But I thought . . ." she started, and then her voice broke suddenly and she looked around in sudden alarm. "Mortimer," she gasped, "where are the gangsters?"

"All taken care of," Mortimer said loftily. "Right down to the last detail."

"But how?" Betty asked incredulously.

Mortimer blew on his knuckles.

"It wasn't very pretty," he said, glorying in her admiring glance. "Quite a bit of gore and all that."

"Oh, my hero," Betty breathed. "I knew you could do it, but I was worried a little bit anyway. When the gangsters left the house after you, I got out of the room and found a phone. I found a phone and called the city. The police are still acting funny so they're sending the G-men down. They should be here soon."

Before she had got the words out of her mouth, the faint, banshee wail of police sirens drifted to them on the breeze.

"There they are now," Betty said.

"Hardly necessary," Mortimer said loftily. "Just tell them that Mortimer Meek has arrived and has the situation well in hand."

MORTIMER MEEK was not the sort to be late for his own wedding. As a matter of fact, he arrived at the church some thirty minutes ahead of schedule. Arrived briskly, in the manner of an impatient Napoleon at a coronation.

He pushed his way through the throngs which had already gathered outside the canopied entrance, throngs attracted by the headlined announcements of the Meek nuptials in the morn-

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ing papers, and made his way to the rectory.

Humming "Pomp and Circumstance" lightly, almost gaily, Mortimer pressed the bell at the Rectory door, and was rewarded by the sight of the minister peering out quizzically from behind its half-opened panel a moment later.

"What—" began the minister, a short, rotund, bald little fellow, looking like a vicar in an English novel.

Mortimer pushed in past him, and swept on into the parlor. The round little minister followed him bewilderedly. "Wha—" began the rotund little parson again.

"I," announced Mortimer, fixing him with a gaze that seemed to challenge any denial, "am Meek."

The minister's brows knit at this announcement, and he seemed to be slightly at a loss for something to say.

"Oh," he ventured after a moment, "are you?"

"Yes," said Mortimer.

"That's nice," murmured the clergyman. "The Good Book says that the meek shall inherit the earth. However, if there's something I can do for you . . . ?" he left his sentence dangling lamely.

"I," said Mortimer frigidly, "am decidedly *not* meek. I am Meek!"

"Oh," said the parson, edging toward the door fearfully, "is that right?" He gulped apprehensively, for Mortimer was fixing him with "The Dominant Stare" of page 38.

"I am getting married in half-an-hour," said Mortimer, "and I thought it wise to check up on the ceremonies beforehand."

The minister paled.

"I'm afraid you can't get married in half-an-hour, young man. We've another marriage scheduled. A Mr—" his eyes opened, and his expression became one of acute apology.

"Ohhhhhh," he murmured, light breaking forth, "*you* are Mr. Meek!"

"Yes," Mortimer replied testily. "I've been trying to tell you as much." He glanced briskly at his watch. "There's only twenty-five minutes left until the ceremony starts. I want to make sure that you don't botch up my wedding."

The minister looked hurt. Hurt and indignant. Clearly, he wasn't used to having bridegrooms accuse him of incompetence.

"Really . . ." he began.

"Never mind," Mortimer cut in, "making any apologies. Have you much experience at this sort of thing?" His tone was that of an employer hiring a scullery wench.

"I have married," the minister replied acidly, "over four hundred couples."

Mortimer reflected on this. Reflected, then said:

"Did all of them take?"

"Take?"

"Yes," Mortimer snapped impatiently. "Did all of the weddings turn out well?"

THE minister looked like a chef who has been accused of leaving hairs in the bottom of his soup bowls.

"*All* my weddings turn out right!"

"Hmmmmm," said Mortimer. "I suppose I'll have to take your word for it." Then: "How about the arrangements for the ceremony? What about the music?"

"Our organist," the parson said indignantly, "is the best. He has selected the usual appropriate music. The Wedding March for the entrance, and Oh Promise Me, for the exit."

Mortimer frowned.

"The entrance music is fair enough. But I don't like the exit stuff."

"It is customary," the minister re-

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plied testily. "Really Mr. Meek, if you'll leave this in our hands, I'm sure—"

"Never mind," Mortimer broke in. "I'll take care of the music. I'll see the organist personally." He stared thoughtfully at the little parson. "See to it," he concluded, "that your end of the thing goes off without a hitch!" He started toward the door.

The rotund little minister felt red waves of indignation rushing up to his head, but much to his amazement, the best he could say as Mortimer stepped out the door was

"Yes, sir, I'll see to it, Mr. Meek."

Mortimer had no sooner stepped out of the rectory door than he was surrounded three deep in clamoring humanity. News reporters, press photographers, curious spectators and autograph seekers milled around him. He glowed importantly as he pressed his way through all these.

Truly, this was to be a wedding befitting the importance of Mortimer Meek, he reflected. Then he remembered that he wished to see the organist.

"Please," he demanded of the crowd, "let me through!"

The crowd parted, and Mortimer marched on. Up on the steps of the church, he could see the Mayor and other local dignitaries waiting top-hatted and impressive, for the start of the ceremony.

"Please, Mr. Meek," a chorus of voices begged him, "won't you give us a few shots?"

Mortimer saw that the chorused request came from a battery of press photographers. He smiled tolerantly, halting.

"How's this, boys?" Mortimer asked jovially striking a pose.

"Fine, Mr. Meek. Chin just a bit higher, please."

Mortimer lifted his chin a bit higher, gazing directly into the line of cameras pointing at him. Good boys, the photographers. Knew a good subject when they saw it. He recognized some of them from his experience at the City Hall, others from his triumph after aiding the F.B.I. Then, behind the shining brass plate of a reflector flash, Mortimer saw a face he recognized from quite a different source.

He was about to open his mouth, about to single out that face with an accusing finger, when the first flash bulbs popped. More popped, and Mortimer blinked dazedly. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, an explosive detonation shattering his eardrums, hurling him to the ground with its concussion!

Head swimming, blood trickling slightly from his nose, Mortimer realized dazedly that he was on the ground. Hazily, he saw a face bending over him, the same face he had recognized a moment before among the photographers. The face of Myfisto, the magician!

He saw, too, that Myfisto's assistant was beside him, that the pair of them were bending over him.

"Good," Myfisto was muttering rapidly to his assistant. "The concussion's done the trick. Give me the plate!"

Dazedly, while trying futilly to rise, Mortimer realized that Myfisto's assistant had handed a copper battery set to the magician. Myfisto was pressing the battery set against Mortimer's aching skull, and the thing was filling his brain with a strange vibration.

The sensation were those of sudden weariness, a momentary weariness, during which something seemed to drain from him, like water from a punctured bag. Then he felt the assistant's hands leave his shoulders, heard Myfisto mutter:

"It is good. See the expression in

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his eyes. My electra-therwillific set has removed his dangerous power!"

PEOPLE were helping Mortimer to his feet, spluttering angry protests. Myfisto and his assistant had vanished into the crowd. Indignantly, Mortimer pushed all hands away from him. He was about to scream out: "Stop those men!" but there were no men to stop.

"Are you all right?" someone was asking anxiously, and Mortimer saw the Mayor.

"Certainly," Mortimer snapped. "Certainly. This shall not interfere with the ceremony. Let us proceed. Where is my bride?" He was climbing the steps to the church as he spoke.

"She's already arrived," someone answered. "We'll have to get around to the vestry for your entrance."

Then, hurriedly, Mortimer was led around the side of the church, up to the front side entrance. Nervously adjusting his cravat, the Mayor, acting Best Man, whispered hoarsely to Mortimer. "Now!"

Mortimer and the Mayor stepped into the vast, crowded church, walking pontifically toward the center front where he was to join his bride. The organist was slipping gracefully into a selection when Mortimer remembered. He'd forgotten to tell the fellow what to play.

Mortimer halted, turning toward the choir loft.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The organ ceased abruptly, and a shocked murmur ran through the church as all necks craned to see the dramatic interruption.

"I don't want that number," Mortimer announced.

The Mayor was plucking frenzily at his sleeve.

"Don't make a scene," he pleaded. "I have over a thousand votes in this church!"

Mortimer ignored him, fixing the tiny figure at the organ in the choir loft with a commanding stare. In a loud clear voice he indicated the number he desired played. There was a feeble protest from the loft, a shocked protest. Mortimer repeated the number. Then the organ commenced again, dutifully.

And to the strains of "Hail The Conquering Hero," Mortimer Meek strode to the center of the church where his bride was to join him.

« « THE GOOD SHIP "FRIDAY" » »

SINCE time immemorial man has clung tenaciously to peculiar superstitions of one sort or another. In the middle of the eighteenth century the seamen of His Majesty's Navy were religiously convinced that it was dangerous and unlucky to put out to sea on a Friday. This belief became so widespread and fixed in the minds of the "tars" that the Admiralty was forced to take unusual measures in an attempt to dislodge it. The superstition was causing them untold inconvenience and, what was more important, it was costing them money which couldn't be tolerated.

So they worked out a very clever scheme. They made a public announcement that the keel of the next ship to be built would be laid on a Friday. This caused a ripple of dismay among the seamen, but the storm broke in full when it was learned that this same ship was to be launched on Friday and christened on Friday. Gray-bearded sailors wagged their heads in profound disapproval and made dire predictions.

The Admiralty completed the shattering of the superstition by naming the ship the H M S Friday and embarking her on her maiden voyage early one Friday morning. They congratulated themselves with the successful completion of their campaign. Surely now the seamen's fears would be dissipated and this annoying and costly superstition would be speedily forgotten.

To give the astute gentlemen of the Admiralty staff credit, it must be admitted that their plan would probably have been enormously successful had it not been for one slight hitch. And that slight hitch was that the H M S Friday never returned from its maiden voyage and has never been heard of or seen, from that day to this.

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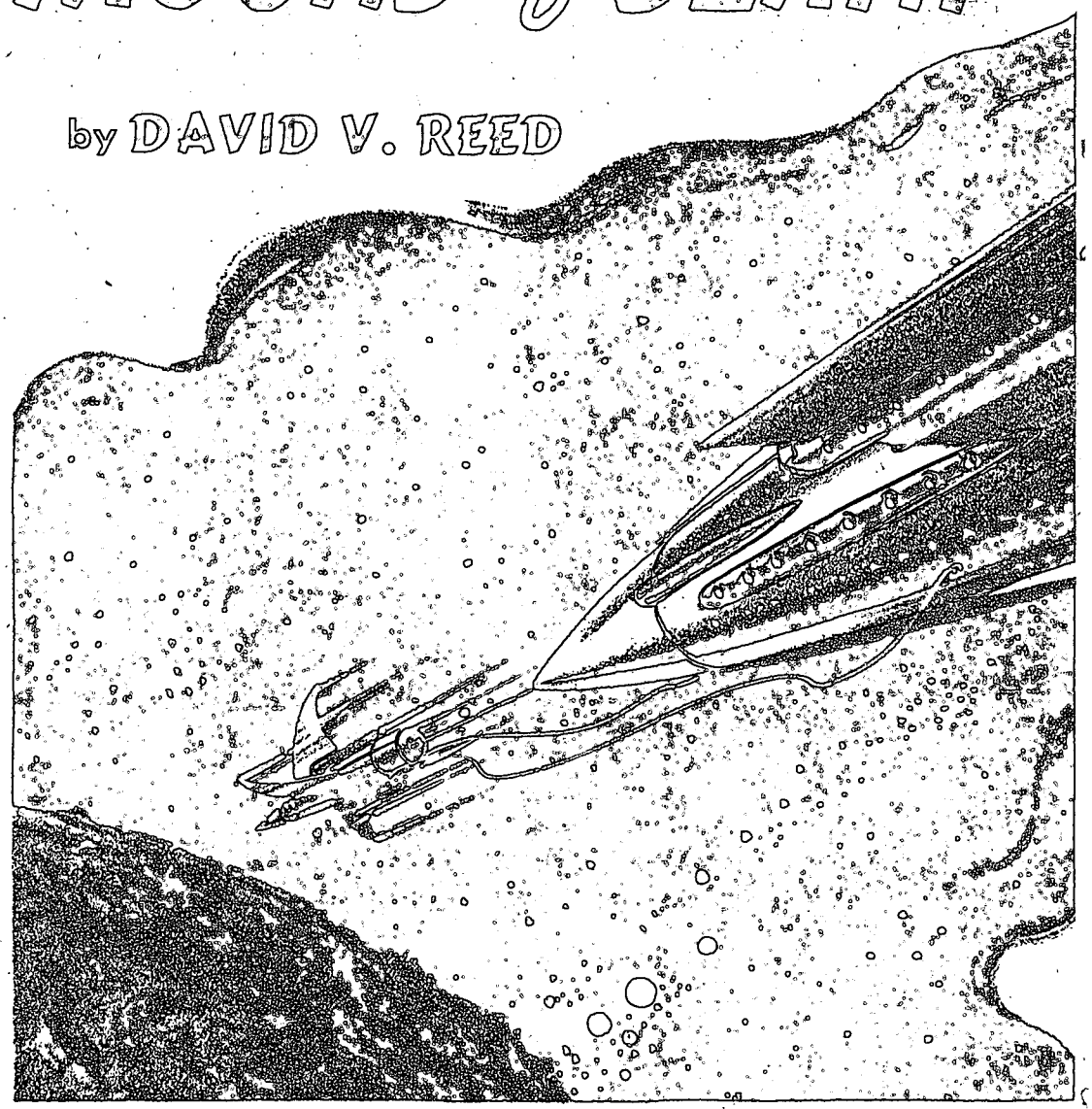
MOONS of DEATH

by DAVID V. REED



Hanley was the best "moon-diver" in the business, but someone was out to "get" him. He didn't know who until he found himself diving blind, compass wrecked, and a liner's fate depending on guesswork.

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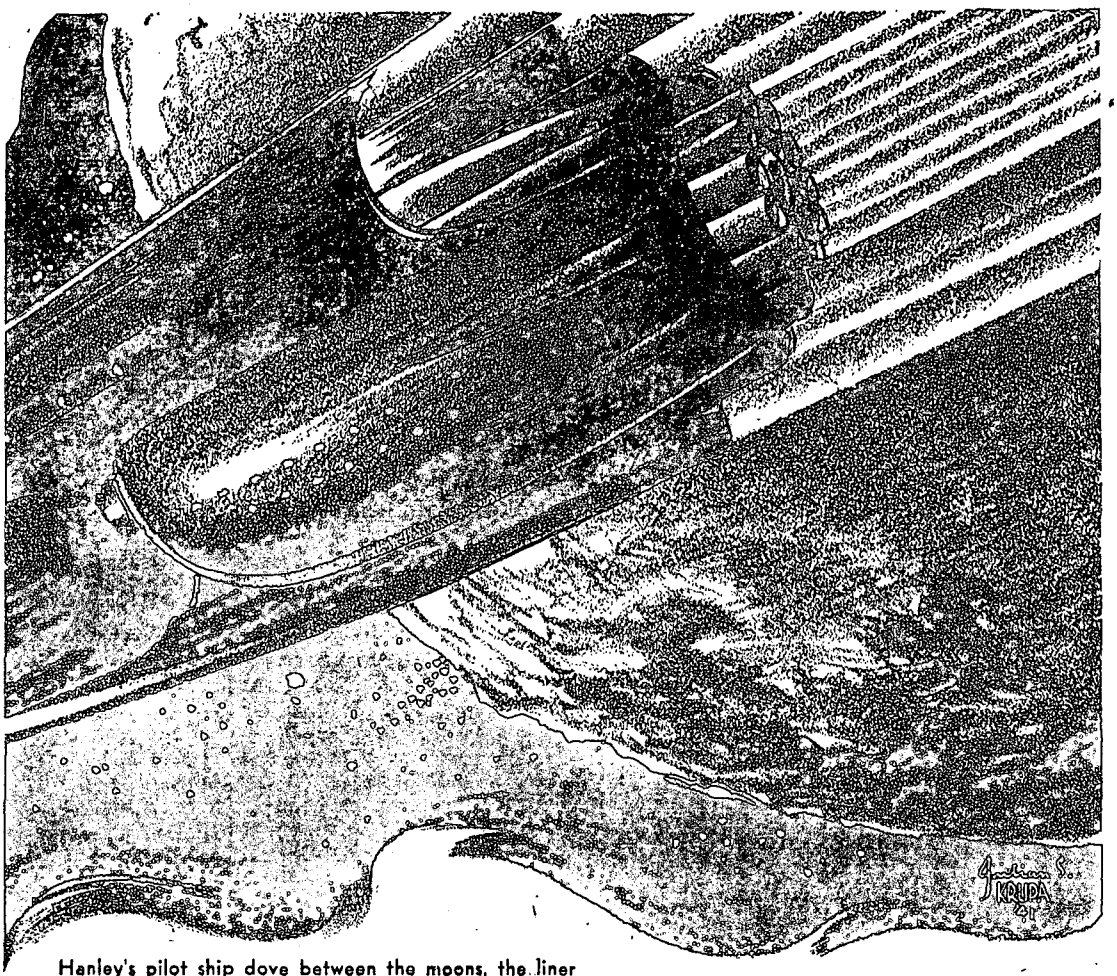

Hanley's pilot ship dove between the moons, the liner close behind.

OLD Rugger Hanley said evenly, "I'm not drunk, Kieller, and you know it. Now give me those lenses and let me go to work."

Samuel Kieller, general manager of the Ceres Company, smiled. "I think you've had a little too much of that Martian *behla,* Rugger. I was watching you as you came across the field. You could hardly walk erect."

"It's nothing," said Hanley quietly. He rubbed a hand across his lined, weatherbeaten face, brushed back his greying hair. "It's just that after Tom Worth crashed on the moons. . . ." His voice died away. "You don't think I'd take any chances up there, do you, Kieller?"

"I'm not worried about you, Rugger. A moon-diver is one life, but when he's piloting in a space liner, hundreds of lives are in his hands. Remember that. Here are your glasses." Kieller opened the huge wall safe and took out a large pair of dark glasses. Stamped into the glass itself was the Interplanetary Patrol seal, Hanley's full name and his resignation number. Those special Haydite lenses were the key to Corellan commerce; they had to be carefully guarded.

Rugger Hanley took the proffered glasses, turned, and walked slowly out of the magnificent office. Even so, there was a slight hesitancy in his steps, as if he wanted to be sure he didn't stagger.

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Samuel Kieller walked to the great windows and watched the old pilot climb into the single-seater moon-diver. At the last minute, one of the ground crew had to help him in. The door adjoining Kieller's office burst open and a heavy, baldish man waddled in hurriedly. "Kieller," he said, "I've been watching old Hanley walk to his ship. He's drunk. Do you think it's safe?"

"Safe?" A crafty gleam lit up Kieller's eyes. "Hanley's diving in the *North Star,* isn't he? And she's heavily insured, isn't she? What if she isn't on our schedule? What if she happens to crash because old Rugger had a shot of *behla* too much?"

"But they can get you for letting him go up in that condition!" the fat man barked. "They're liable to see right through the whole—"

"They won't," said Kieller calmly. "Because Hanley won't crash. Not *today.* Drunk or sober he's the best moon-diver on Corella, and he'll bring the *North Star* in safely. But tomorrow the *Silverbeam* comes in."

"The *Silverbeam?* Isn't Hanley's son aboard that ship?"

"You have an excellent memory, Frazer. Yes, young Ronald Hanley is our new Navigation Officer on the *Silverbeam.* Rugger will want to bring that ship in." Kieller paused, lighting a fresh cigar. "I'll have a little surprise for old Rugger tomorrow with your help," he said, showing his teeth as he smiled. The fat man sighed and smiled with him, and in silence both watched the tiny pilot craft take off.

There was a sudden roar, a flash in the rocket pit, and the ship swept into the moon-studded heavens of Corella. On the inner side of the moons, they looked like pale green and white bodies, moving harmoniously across the sky in beautiful order. But they were more than that—they were almost the sky itself because there were so many of them. The 212 moons of Corella were a curtain that separated it from the universe, a curtain with tiny holes that showed now and then. Hanley's ship had unerringly darted through one of those holes the instant it appeared.*

Now he had gone up to meet the *North Star* two hundred thousand miles

* The planet Corella, first discovered in 3415, A.D. is surrounded by a complete curtain of moons —212 of them! These moons, of various sizes, together form what amounts to a hollow sphere, and inside that sphere lies Corella with its valuable minerals and plants, and the great city of Metro. The Corellan moons all move at different velocities, circling the planet, and as they move, from time to time there appear spaces between them which appear like holes in the curtain of moons. The only approach to Corella is through those holes in the curtain. A mistake in the speed or location of one of the moons is disaster and death on the outer, sun-baked surfaces of the Corellan moons.

In the early days of the planet's history, more than a score of ships were lost, trying to pierce the mystery of Corella. Then Malcolm Steinway devised a special instrument, the great Steinway Integrator. This instrument charted all the moons and their various speeds, and mathematically calculated the holes in the curtain. The holes must be passed at exactly the right instant, for they last but an instant.

Landing on Corella is possible only when a "moon-diver" or pilot boat comes out to guide a liner or freighter in, using its Integrator. The moon-diver goes in front; it is a fantastically fast vessel, but it cannot stay out for more than an hour. It meets the liners 200,000 miles out, gets in front, sets the speed for the liner to follow, then dives for the curtain. The liner dives behind it, and it always appears as if the ships are darting to certain death, but at the last instant the hole appears and there is beautiful Corella, shining underneath.

One other factor complicates life for moon-diver pilots. The two brilliant suns that light Corella with reflected light, spend most of their intense heat and light on the outer surface of the moons. So brilliant is this light that exposure to it by the naked eye brings on a peculiar blindness, known as "Corellan eyes." To guard against it, passenger and freight ships diving through always provide dark pads for travelers' eyes. Pilots, who must use their eyes to watch the Integrator, wear a special lens known as Haydite, which is made and checked by the Interplanetary Patrol, to guard against inferior brands being made by commercial companies if they should enter into competition.—Ed.

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out, to lead it in a dive back through the moons—lead it as only a pilot craft with the Steinway Integrator could lead the way...

Forty minutes later, the eerie whine of two ships coming in together could be heard all over the spaceport of the Ceres Spaceways Company. Kieller, chewing the butt of his cigar, and Frazer, standing beside him, looked into the heavens. The great moons moved in their various orbits and speeds, some slowly, some scudding along—and suddenly there was a gap among them and two ships came diving through, easily, gracefully, swinging in in wide arcs.

When Rugger Hanley climbed out of his craft, he didn't go chat with the officers of the *North Star* the way other moon-diving pilots did. He lurched across the field, talking to no one, disappearing from sight.

"Odd fellow, that Hanley," sighed Frazer. "Sort of a hermit."

"Been that way for years," Kieller said. "Maybe he's been in the game too long. He used to be pretty lively and a good mixer until he took to drinking *behla*." He crushed the cigar butt. "Works out fine for us," he said softly. "Tomorrow, when the *Silverbeam* crashes, we'll be through for a long while. Just as well the last crash will be above suspicion."

"JUST leave the capper * here with me, Nikko," said Big Mike O'Shea, the bartender. "No use trying to wake Rugger. He's full of *behla*."

The little Martian shook his head. In both hands he held tightly clasped a capsule wrapped in the yellow and blue paper that signified it came from Earth. He stood over the sleeping form of Rugger Hanley and tried to wake his master. It was long past the Corellan curfew, and the drinking house was empty. The police had cleared the place an hour before, and they let Hanley stay there only because Big Mike had said he would put up Hanley for the night.

"You hear me, Nikko?" O'Shea said as he swept the littered floor. "Leave the capper here. Rugger likes to read his son's cappers when he's sober, and it can wait until then." He approached the little Martian who refused to move. One of his large hands burrowed into the Martian's little ones and he took away the capsule from the silent Nikko. The bartender turned it around and looked at the writing on it. Suddenly his face went white. His hands relaxed and the capsule fell from his grasp.

"It can't be!" Big Mike gasped. "It can't—*Tom Worth's been dead three weeks!*"

Nikko nodded his head solemnly, and his green eyes flashed, as if he understood the shocking words. He stooped and picked up the capsule. O'Shea muttered as he shook himself. "Come on, you damned heathen Martian, we'll both of us wake up old Rugger."

A few minutes later, Rugger Hanley was sick from the stuff that Mike poured down his throat. He held his head in his hands and groaned. "I'm all right, Mike. Don't give me any more of that damned swamp syrup." He lifted his head and looked up, his eyes glazed. "Is that Nikko?" he asked. "What's little Nikko doing here?"

* A slang expression for "capsule letter". The small aluminum capsule contained a roll of copper wire on which a message had been recorded. This economical and personal method of communicating antedated letter-writing where no audivisor communication was possible. The cappers were bound in papers colored to denote their various points of origin; white for Venus, red for Mars, blue and yellow for Earth, etc.—Ed.

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"Rugger," said O'Shea quickly, "you've got to listen to me! Nikko brought you a message, a capper from Earth."

Hanley nodded. "I know. Been expecting it. My son's coming in tomorrow on the *Silverbeam*. It's all over now, Mike. He's going to find out about me at last . . . and it's too late to help me. . . "

"Rugger! It isn't from your son—it's from Tom Worth!"

If old Rugger Hanley heard, he gave no indication of it "It's over now, Mike," he went on quietly, immersed in his own thoughts. "I've won. Tomorrow my son comes in as a Navigation Officer on a great liner . . . but he'll find out about me. . . . It's his first flight, and I'm washed up . . . too late to help me" His voice trailed off, then he went on, as if he had just heard O'Shea. "Tom Worth, did you say? He wanted to see Ronald. He loved the kid."

The bartender grabbed the jug of *neemsplant* extract that Hanley had called swamp syrup, and forced more of it down Hanley's mouth. Then he ran to the back of the bar and brought out the capsule-reader. He paused briefly when he took up the capsule, for he was breaking one of the strictest I.P. laws, but he broke open the seal. He took out the copper wire and inserted it into the reader, and touched the switch.

The mcehanical diaphragm began its sensitive speaking. *"Hello, Rugger. I'm sending this to you in a roundabout way—"*

Rugger Hanley started violently. His eyes stared up into space. He half rose from his chair. "Lord!" he cried hoarsely. "Tom—Tom's voice!"

O'SHEA held his hands to the switch. He shivered involuntarily as he nodded assent and tried to meet Hanley's gaze. "Nikko brought it here. It's a capper from Tom Worth. Listen!"

" . . . roundabout way, but I'll explain that after I'm through with the important part of this message. Today is Thursday, the twelfth, and I'm going up in a few minutes to dive the Cythera *through the moons. . . ."* As both men listened, the voice seemed that of doom itself, for on the twelfth, three weeks before, Tom Worth's pilot craft and the *Cythera* had crashed in a dive. *" . . . but I've just discovered something funny going on around here.*

"I can't tell you everything now, except a conversation I overheard today. You remember the way you commented on the luck the Ceres Company had this year, having two big ships crash and collecting insurance worth ten times the ships' value, just when it looked like they were going broke? I heard Kieller talking today, and I think he arranged those crashes!" There was a pause as the voice stopped, and the voice came more quickly, as if it were arguing. *"I know this'll sound crazy to you, Rugger, but I think the* Claybourne *and the* Skybird *were both his work. If my hunch is right, the* Cythera *is next and after that, the* Silverbeam—"

"No!" Rugger Hanley leaped out of his chair, shouting. "No, Tom—you're wrong! Not the—"

Big Mike held the switch until Hanley quieted down. He was still partially under the influence of the *behla*, and he was trembling. When Hanley nodded, Mike let the reader continue.

"Half an hour ago, when Kieller gave me my Haydite lenses, I thought there was something wrong with them. I sent those over to you today, on the twelfth, because I'm not going to use them. I wrote you to give them to your

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boy Ronald as a present from me, but that was a blind, in case Kieller had the package opened. Then I asked him for my auxiliary pair of lenses, and I'll use those today.

"In case I don't come back, for one reason or another, have those glasses examined. I'm sure there's something wrong with them. I'm sending this capsule in a peculiar way, first to Earth, and then I'll have it trans-shipped back here to you, because Kieller asked a lot of questions when I wanted my other lenses, and he may try to trace my mail and stop it.

"I'll feel awful funny if I'm with you the day you get this capsule and nothing's happened. I'm laughing already. So long, Rugger."

THE voice stopped, but the copper wire kept spinning until the rest of it had played out. In complete silence, the two men and the Martian sat there. The sweat was pouring down old Rugger's face.

"No," said Hanley, "it can't be. I've slaved too long and I've worked too hard." The quietness of his voice frightened Big Mike. "They can't do this to me," Rugger went on talking. "You know, Mike, now that my son's coming, he'll know the truth about me, and he'll be angry. He'll say I threw myself away, because I think it's too late for me now. . . ."

But suddenly Rugger Hanley sat up straight in his chair, and his lips pressed into a tight line. "Mike!" he said, loudly. "Mike—do you realize what they've done? Do you know what those butchers have done for their money?"

O'Shea shook his head. He couldn't speak.

And now, the momentary hysteria had passed from Hanley. "My boy's on that *Silverbeam,*" he said, speaking slowly, "and he's got Tom Worth's lenses with him."

"What?"

"Yes. I didn't wait for him to come. I sent them to him that same day. I wanted him to be wearing them when he came here on his first flight."

"But they may be your only evidence against Kieller, and if—"

"Yes, Mike," Rugger Hanley nodded grimly. "If the *Silverbeam* crashes tomorrow, I'll lose the chance to avenge Tom Worth, and I'll lose my son . . . and my reason for living the way I've been living these three years."

"What are you going to do?" O'Shea breathed. "Weren't you planning on diving the *Silverbeam* in yourself?"

"It isn't a question of diving it in," Hanley clipped. "The ships that crashed were up against something. Maybe the lenses, maybe something else. The *Silverbeam* has to be stopped from coming in tomorrow, before anything happens to her!"

"But how?"

"I'll work that out as I go. Nikko, you come with me. Mike, keep that capper here for me."

Before O'Shea could stop him, Hanley had walked, half stumbling, through the door, leaning on Nikko.

THERE were always lights at the spaceport. Day and night, no matter whether ships were expected in, the green-golden beacons lit up the great fields, the rocket pits like wounds in the smooth land. In the Communications Building, the operators were sitting, talking to the ships that were out somewhere in the void. Here the freighters, small and lonely, the gay liners, the military ships, let their voices be heard as they passed by, exchanging news, gossip, banter. The void knew no day or night. . . .

A small terra-car drew up noiselessly beside the huge Communications Build-

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ing, and a spare, unstopped figure came out. "Nikko," said the man, "wait here for me." Then Rugger Hanley went into the building. He entered an elevator and went up to the topmost story. When he came out, he was in the midst of the Section-At-Hand division, where contact was kept with the ships bound for Corella from all over the universe.

"Hi, Rugger," a short man called out to him. "What're you doing up this time of night? We haven't seen you around here in a long while."

Hanley forced a blank smile. "Hello, Charley. I'm being kept pretty busy these days." He paused. "Listen, Charley, will you do me a favor?"

Charley grinned. "Run out of *behla?* Here's a couple of bucks—"

Rugger gestured impatiently. "Thanks," he said. "It isn't that. Listen, my boy's coming in tomorrow on the *Silverbeam*. Do you think you could manage to let me get a message to him?"

"Hell, Rugger," said Charley, "I don't have to tell you that the *Silverbeam's* in the At-Hand section, and with the interplanetary clock at 22:04, most of the crew's asleep there."

"I know. Only this is something special. Could you manage to fake a navigation call, so they'll call him to the audivisor and I'll hear his voice?"

"You sure are nuts about that kid," Charley muttered. "Listen, Rugger, you know you're asking me to break all the rules? What the hell kind of a message am I going to fake? What's the hurry anyway? He'll be in within twelve hours. Can't you wait?"

"Tell him to watch out for asteroid fragments—anything, I don't give a damn. After that, there's a message I've got to give him. It may be important."

"Asteroid fragments, hmmmm!" Charley snorted. "If the chief ever heard me give out . . . Okay, I'll do it, but I must be nuts. Only remember you can't say anything personal. He'll recognize your voice, but you'll have to give him the message in third person."

"Thanks, Charley," Hanley said quietly. He could hardly conceal the fever that burned in him. The strain to keep his voice and manner casual was almost more than he could endure. He took Charley's arm and followed into one of the cubicles whose walls consisted of great concave charts of the void around Corella. Here and there tiny pin-points of colored lights marked the locations of ships as the lights moved imperceptibly along the charts.

"See that white one?" said Charley, pointing. "That's it."

"Sure looks pretty."

"Look out, Rugger!" Charley grabbed Hanley by one arm. "Hell, you almost fell right on top of the speaker!" Charley frowned as he looked at Hanley. "I can smell that *behla* over here," he said, shaking his head. "Now take it easy while I get her."

CHARLEY'S hands raced over the glistening black instrument board, touching levers and pressing buttons. A red bulb glowed brightly and Charley took the speaker. "Corella Ceres Company calling *Silverbeam,*" he said once. Then he repeated it.

Silverbeam in Corella Section-At-Hand," came the answer.

"Navigation warning. Is the Navigation Officer there?"

"That you, Charley?"

"Right. Hello, Fred."

"Listen, Charley, you know the whole damn crew's asleep. What the hell are you doing interrupting my reading?"

"You read too much anyway. Fred, can you get me the Navigation Officer?"

"You serious about that?"

"You're damned well told I am. You

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know the by-laws by now, son. Navigation warnings in person to the Officer."

"Nuts," said the voice. Then it added, "*Silverbeam* in Corella Section-At-Hand requests your line to keep open. The Navigation Officer is being called." A tiny, stifled voice added, "Nuts."

"Okay, Rugger," Charley whispered. "You take it from here." As he stood up to let Hanley take his chair, Charley said, "What's the matter, Rugger? "What're you shaking like that for? Anything wrong?"

Hanley shook his head. "I'm fine," he whispered. "Just fine."

"Navigation Officer Hanley aboard the *Silverbeam* reporting," the audiphone said suddenly.

"Navigation warning," Rugger Hanley said evenly. "Unconfirmed reports of asteroid fragments. Suggest double watch all the way." He couldn't keep his hands still.

"Hey, is that—" the voice started, then stopped. "Thank you very much for the timely warning. Is that all?"

"Personal message to Navigation Officer Hanley," said Rugger. He felt Charley's hand on his arm and he shook it off. "He is requested by Rugger Hanley not to wear Haydite lenses sent him recently and to use the standard equipment of the ship. Have you got that?"

Rugger Hanley could hear Charley's sigh of relief as he gave the message impersonally. He looked up at Charley and whispered, "Get me a drink of water, Charley. I feel faint. Don't worry—I'll sign off."

The short man hesitated, then hurried through the door.

"Ronald!" Rugger Hanley said sharply. "Listen to me! You've got to get the *Silverbeam* to turn back! Don't let it land on Corella! I can't explain. Do you hear me? They're trying to sabotage the—"

"Rugger — get away from that speaker!" Charley had come running back into the room and he dived at Hanley. Hanley stood up and swung his free left hand, catching the short man on the chest. As Charley fell, he raised an arm and swung it across the black board. The red bulb went out suddenly. One word had come through the audiphone: *"What?"*

Charley stood up dazed. "You're crazy!" he barked. "Rugger, you've gone out of your head! Do you realize what you've done may cost me my job?" He brushed a hand across his chest.

"It may cost me more than that!" said Hanley savagely. "Charley, I can't reason with you now. I've got to get the *Silverbeam* to change her course! It's a matter of life and death for hundreds of people!"

"Get out!" Charley cried. "Get out of here, you drunken fool! I'll have the police here in five seconds." His face was a mask of rage and bewilderment, and he raised a hand over the alarm signal. "Get out of here while I try to undo the damage you've done."

Slowly, Rugger Hanley backed out of the cubicle and made his way down the corridor. When he came out of the building, he entered the terra-car. "Take me to 400 Metro Boulevard," he told the driver. There was no longer unsteadiness in his voice.

"YOU did *what*, Hanley?"

"I tried to warn them over the audiphone, Commissioner," said Hanley. "Not more than an hour ago."

Commissioner Paige of the Interplanetary Police scowled. He was in his pajamas and he was shivering with cold as he sat with Hanley in the foyer of his home. Outside the first grey

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signs of the Corellan dawn were appearing. "There'll be trouble about this, Hanley," the Commissioner said, sighing. "Of course, I'll wait until I've heard of it in my official capacity. And I'll take into account the fact that you're still upset over the death of your closest friend . . ." he grunted, "even if you did hardly ever see him since you took to drinking."

'You mean you don't believe me?"

"Frankly, no, Hanley." Paige took on a kindlier attitude. "Be reasonable, man. How can I have the course of a liner changed on the—uh—unverifiable scraps you've given me? Where is the capsule? Your friend O'Shea seems to have left his bar and you don't know where he lives. The mysterious Haydite lenses are aboard the *Silverbeam.* All right. Let's wait a few hours. The ship will come in, and then we'll have a look at them. Maybe there has been foul play. The Department hasn't overlooked that."

"But the ship won't come in! Tom Worth was right!"

"There isn't any sense in your exciting yourself this way, Hanley. You can see I can't do anything." Commissioner Paige drew his robe on. "Isn't it faintly possible, Hanley," he said, half humorously, "that all this is just a bad *behla* dream?"

Rugger Hanley rose and clenched his fists. "I don't drink *behla,*" he said slowly. "I haven't had a pint of the stuff in the last three years you spoke of. I had some earlier tonight, when I realized that tomorrow my son would be here. It broke me up. But I don't drink."

"Ah," said Commission Paige, rising with Hanley. "So you don't drink *behla,* is it? Perhaps you can explain your constant—"

"I can't. Not unless I'm willing to give up my last chance to save that ship. And that's one thing I won't give up." He bade the Commissioner good-night and went back to the terra-car.

After that, Rugger Hanley lay in bed awake all through the night, unable to sleep. And all the while he was thinking, planning, working the thing out in his mind. There were only a few chances for Kieller to take to gain his ends. Hanley had to know them all in advance. There must have been something he'd overlooked.

For the rest of that night, Nikko, the little Martian, sat by his bed, dozing off and awaking just in time to light Hanley's next cigarette. It was very quiet where they lived, far from Metro, far from the spaceport and the men with whom Hanley had spent so many years of his life. . . .

THE *Silverbeam* was due in at 32:30, interplanetary time, and an hour after noon Corellan time, but Rugger Hanley got to the spaceport an hour ahead of time. Word of the past night's events had gotten around, and as he made his way slowly to the pilot craft hangars, he could feel the way people were looking at him. He felt very tired and he knew his face showed it. He had to be very careful now that everyone was watching him. There was no sign of his drinking now, and he hoped that most people would assume he was tired . . . because if they caught the answer . . .

The mechanics, with whom Hanley had seldom exchanged a word in years, clustered around him One of them had a message. "Mr. Kieller said to be sure to see him before you go up for the *Silverbeam.*"

Rugger nodded. He had planned to see Kieller himself. In Rugger Hanley's plans, Kieller was destined to play a leading role within the hour. But he was a bit startled to hear that he had

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been posted to take in the *Silverbeam*. Of course, Kieller had known that Hanley would want to bring that ship in; Kieller had conferred a great favor on Hanley by signing young Ronald on one of the Ceres Company ships. But that meant that they weren't going to discipline Rugger for last night's events. . . . Or did it mean that at all?

He had the mechanics go over the tiny pilot craft thoroughly. He was careful not to ask them more than the usual questions, not until they were all finished. Then he said, "Please check and see whether the sparkers are all set," then, hesitating, and as if he had thought it over, he added, "On second thought, get me a whole new line of sparkers."

Of course there was hesitancy; he'd expected it. One of the mechanices said, "But the ship doesn't need them, sir."

"She lost speed too fast yesterday," said Hanley. "I think—"

"But, sir," the mechanic interrupted, "you didn't use this ship yesterday at all."

"Didn't I?" Hanley said, cursing his blunder. "That's all right," he caught himself, "get a new set anyway. I'm not taking any chances today. If I could use a brand new ship, I would."

"Yes sir," said the mechanic. "It's a big day for you, isn't it?" He was a friendly youngster, that mechanic.

"Mind your business!" Rugger snapped. He was immediately sorry. He had been wondering which of these young mechanics was the one who would soon be sneaking away to report to Kieller, to tell him of the careful check-up he'd ordered, the new sparkers. One of them, certainly, and then Kieller would know. Hanley had to stop him.

WHEN the new line of sparkers had been installed, Rugger Hanley said, "Lock up the ship, please, and give me the key." The mechanic hesitated at the strange order, but he took one look at Hanley's set jaw and complied. As he gave Hanley the key, Rugger whispered, "Sorry I barked at you, son. I'm just upset."

As he made his way to the administration Building, just as he left, Hanley heard one of the mechanics say in a low tone, "The old boy's gone completely nuts. Morale shattered. Worth's crash must have . . ."

He wanted to walk away faster, but he kept his pace slow, his head down. There were more people at the Administration Building, standing in little knots. The news had spread fast. Hanley wondered whether it wasn't a good thing. Maybe all the publicity would stop Kieller because it would be too co-incidental.

No, it wouldn't do that at all. If anything happened now, they would be sure that Hanley had been crazy, and his unbalance had resulted in a tragedy. It was the best thing he could have done for Kieller. They could only say that Kieller might have exercised better judgment.

"Hello, Hanley. Aren't you going to talk to me?"

Rugger started. "Sorry," he mumbled. "I must have overlooked you. I'm all wrapped up in thought, Commissioner Paige."

"Come here a moment, Hanley," said the Commissioner, taking Hanley by the arm. "That's just what I want to talk to you about." He went inside the cool corridor with Hanley and stopped where they were alone. "I've been upset by the things you told me last night, Hanley. Frankly, I'm worried whether it's exactly wise for you to go up in your mental state." The Commissioner hesitated. "I've been wondering whether Kieller isn't showing more sentimental-

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ity than sound judgment in allowing you to go up today."

"Please," said Hanley, his voice barely a whisper, "stay out of this. I'm all right. I've been flying these ships for fifteen years. You know I wouldn't go up if I thought there was any reason for me not to."

"If anything happens—"

"Nothing's going to happen," said Hanley flatly. "Nothing!"

Paige smiled. "All right, Hanley," he said. "That's all I wanted to hear. If you aren't afraid . . . I trust your judgment implicitly. I was only worried you might show up, ah—"

"I know," said Hanley. "Drunk. I've never gone up drunk in my life." He turned away, walking down the hall. He didn't like the way Commissioner Paige had been looking at him; he couldn't take the chance.

Now that he was about to open the door to Kieller's office, the first doubt seized him. What time was it? There couldn't be much time left, and he had to act quickly and smoothly. He entered the reception room. "Mr. Kieller's waiting," said the secretary. "There isn't much time."

Rugger Hanley walked through the door the secretary opened. Kieller stood up from his desk. "Ah, Hanley," he said, cordially, "I've been waiting to—"

HANLEY closed the door with his back and stood against it. As Kieller spoke, he withdrew his hands from his pilot's jacket. In his right hand there was a short, blue barreled electric gun. "Don't say another word, Kieller," Hanley said softy, advancing. "I haven't much time. Open the wall safe."

Kieller's eyes held fear. "Hanley, have you gone out of your—"

"Open the safe."

It was the very quietness with which Hanley said it that got Kieller. He couldn't take his eyes off the gun. They had outlawed those guns ten years before. The old rocketeers had carried them. They could make a hole through steel, quietly, in a second. Kieller opened the safe.

"Give me Tom Worth's Haydite lenses," said Hanley evenly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Kieller.

"I'll give you five seconds—"

The inter-office phone buzzed and a girl's voice called, "The *Silverbeam* is about to start her dive. Mr. Hanley must hurry."

"You haven't any time, Hanley," said Kieller. Hanley took a step forward. Suddenly, Kieller's voice changed, and a new light shone in his eyes. "All right, Hanley," he said. "You've got me—but you can't do a thing until you come down again. You've no time. Here." He handed over two pairs of lenses from the safe.

"So that's it," said Hanley. "That's how you got Tom. You switched both pairs on him."

"Yes," Kieller smiled wryly. "He suspected the first pair, but not the second. You know, the light from those moons is simply terrible."

Rugger Hanley went pale. The nails of his left hand tore his palm. "Who else did you use this on?" he said.

"No one," Kieller replied calmly. "I don't use the same idea more than twice, and in this case I used it once."

"What about the *Claybourne* and the *Skybird?*"

"Ah, yes. I had another little device there. I—"

"Mr. Hanley," the phone called, "the *Silverbeam* is starting her dive now. Your ship's ready. You're late."

"Hurry," said Kieller, smiling, "or the *Silverbeam* may join—"

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Hanley feverishly pointed to a piece of paper. If only he'd watched the time. Someone was knocking on the door. "Coming," called Hanley. "Write that down, damn you," said Hanley to Kieller. "Write fast. Put down what you said about Tom Worth." He waited, glanced at the paper. "Now write this," he said. "'I also brought about the crash of the *Claybourne* and the *Skybird* by substituting worn lines of sparkers in their engines, causing the rockets to lose speed and slow the dives—"

Kieller hesitated, then smiled as he continued writing. "Very bright of you, Hanley," he observed. "It's a pleasure to lose to a man like you. You've got me dead to rights."

" . . . and cause the pilot craft—" Hanley was dictating.

"Mr. Hanley! Mr. Hanley! The *Silverbeam* is diving! She's calling for the pilot craft!" They were kicking at the door now, hammering and calling outside.

"That's enough!" said Hanley. He grabbed the paper and ran to the door, and as he opened it, he heard Kieller call after him, "Remember a confession's worthless without evidence—"

HANLEY rushed through the office, bumping into people, ran into the corridor, putting the gun away as he ran, trying to avoid the throngs that were everywhere and not succeeding. Several porters saw him coming and formed a flying wedge for him, and he ran behind them to the ship. It was in the pit, tilted, ready for blasting. He fumbled for the key, gave it to a mechanic, then jumped inside. The door slammed behind him as he settled into his cramped quarters. He was still holding Tom Worth's lenses and the crumpled sheet of paper that Kieller had written.

He kicked over the bars under his feet, started the engine, let his hands touch the controls. . . . The sudden shock, the lift and tear of the rockets, the noise of the blasting. Ten seconds later, Hanley slowed his speed and peered through the glassite ports. He had been so late in starting that he'd missed all the usual holes in the curtain of moons. The Steinway Integrator, taking up most of the forward control board, was flashing brightly, its calculators marking the tiny figures and letters as they changed from instant to instant.

The *Silverbeam* was propably halfway through her dive by now. He could imagine the panic that must have been inside the hearts of the men on her bridge, as she dived, unable to stop, without the sight of a pilot ship to take her in. The Integrator was ticking away, flashing, and the noise of the rockets were thunder in Hanley's ears. The fatigue of the sleepless night came up suddenly to threaten his skill, and Kieller's last words rang in his ears.

"Evidence." He had it. He had it with him. Some of it Mike O'Shea had, and the rest, the counterfeit lenses, Ronald Hanley had. He could get them together, but only if he lived, and only if he brought the *Silverbeam* in safely.

When he roared through the curtain, the twin suns of Corella were close together, and the moons were at their brightest. In his hurry, Hanley had forgotten to take his own lenses! But he had Tom Worth's. The lenses were made for individuals, according to their sight, but it didn't matter much to Hanley now.

He let out the rockets to their maximum speed and sat relaxed, trying to get the feel of the ship. She was going well; the sparkers had done it. How right he had been about the sparkers!

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Not that it had been so difficult to figure out. There weren't many places in a ship that could be quickly and effectively sabotaged, that wouldn't immediately be apparent in a check-up. But one had to suspect before one could exercise caution. And Hanley had more than suspected—he had known!

Where was the *Silverbeam?* It was time he had gotten her call. And there it came. "Hello, Hanley? Thank God you're up. We're halfway down. Can you see us?"

"No. Correct direction. Those suns are too close."

"Tack three points and a half port at present speed and hold it until we hail you."

RUGGER HANLEY set the controls and took a deep breath. He didn't usually have to fish for ships; he was up there in plenty of time, waiting for them, with time to spare. . . .

"Hello, Hanley." It was Kieller's voice, coming through the audiphone, quietly. "We're on my private line now, Hanley, and I thought I'd like to have a last chat with you. Now don't tune me out—this is important. You know, that was a celver thing you did at the port today, having those sparkers changed. The only thing is, I hadn't had them touched at all. You see? I don't use the same idea more than twice."

There was a dangerous deliberateness in Kieller's voice that made Rugger Hanley's scalp tingle. "I didn't count on the sparkers at all," he was saying. "Instead—"

"Hello, Hanley!" the contact phone bawled, drowning out Kieller's voice, "Can you see us now?"

Hanley pressed his face close to the glassite. "Yes," he said, as he threw open the switch to answer. "Changing direction and getting ready to dive before you."

He touched the controls slightly and the contact phone shouted, "Hanley—veer off!" He saw the dark shape flash by him suddenly and he kicked the bars until the sky was empty again.

"Did you hear that, Hanley?" came the taunting voice of Kieller over the audiphone.

"Hanley—what the hell is the matter with you? Who's in that ship with you? Stop that talking there and pay attention! You almost rammned us!"

"Can you hear that other voice?" Hanley called. A sudden flash of hope had gone through him.

"Only a mumble. What's going on? Stop it!"

"Kieller's talking to me from the port," Hanley said. "You know I can't stop that. He's throwing me off, upsetting me. Get him to stop."

There was no way to stop an audiphone voice from a spaceport. It hadn't been provided for, according to the I.P. laws, to make certain that a pilot always listened to the port instructions.

"Do you understand, Hanley?" said Kieller's voice, speaking very softly. Rugger Hanley gritted his teeth and turned the ship over in its dive, adjusting his glasses. The *Silverbeam* was a black spot against the light, and as he dove at it, the spot grew larger. Hanley's mind was in chaos. He could hardly think straight. What was Kieller saying? What had he said, in that quiet, contented voice, while the contact phone had shouted instructions from the *Silverbeam?*

"So you see, Hanley, your caution with the sparkers didn't help you," Kieller's voice returned. "What can you do without an Integrator?"

"All right, Hanley, you're well in front now," called the *Silverbeam.* "We're following, matching speed. Well done. Hold on."

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There were no more than five minutes left now.

"Look at your Integrator," Kieller said, softly, his voice just at Hanley's ears. "It looks all right, doesn't it? It was all right when you went up, wasn't it? Well, it isn't anymore. I saved my special idea just for you, Hanley. *I arranged with the kind aid of Mr. Frazer, to have your Integrator unbalanced.*"

SUDDENLY it hit Rugger Hanley. He had heard the words before, but he hadn't really understood them, hadn't listened, hadn't . . . So that was what Kieller had saved for the last! Not the lenses, not the sparkers —the Integrator—the one thing Rugger Hanley had never thought of, because he never had figured on Frazer being part of the conspiracy.

"Hanley, what are you laughing at?" the *Silverbeam* called.

Rugger threw out the contact sending phone, so his voice could no longer be heard. He was laughing almost hysterically now, and the tears were rolling down his cheeks. He was crying like a child, and then the noise stopped, and only the tears and the shaking of his shoulders showed that he hadn't stopped. He was diving now full into the moons and the *Silverbeam* was right behind him.

The moons were like great, hot balls of gold. Their light came up through his lenses and filled his brain. Rugger Hanley was quiet at last, his body motionless, his hands poised, leaping to the board and touching it, and the tiny craft danced with him. Faster, faster, the rockets blasting away, the moons rushing up, the light unbearable. A touch and the ship swerved, then swerved back again.

"All right, Hanley! Hold!" The *Silverbeam* called.

Then Corella was under him, and the moons above. The great planet was lovely to see. Rugger Hanley sat calmly now, guiding the ship in, spotting the spaceport and its huge markings. He was at home up here. He wondered whether he would hear Kieller's voice again, but the audiphone was quiet.

"Beautifully done, pilot Hanley!" the *Silverbeam* called.

CHAPTER V

IT wasn't an unusual landing, because no one knew what had happened. The pilot craft landed smoothly, and the *Silverbeam* lay down in her cradle, giving a mild thrill to the children whose parents had taken them to the spaceport that day.

Not till Hanley stepped out of the ship did he realize that there was something unusual after all. There was a lot of noise coming from the Administration Building, and he thought there were people running out to him. Then, at his elbow, Commissioner Paige said, "He killed himself, just as the *Silverbeam* came into sight." The Commissioner paused, then said, "We had hooked up a phone on Kieller's, and we heard every word he said to you up there. The others gave you up for lost."

"But not you, sir?"

"No," said Paige, "not I. Because I knew the answer. It came to me after you blasted off. I prayed I was right. Hold tight now, here they come."

The spaceport police was fighting with the mob that surrounded the pilot craft, but they let one through, Ronald Hanley. "Dad!" he said, quietly, taking his father's hand, "I just heard."

Commissioner Paige bent over and whispered, "Take off your lenses,

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Hanley. You're still wearing them."

Rugger smiled and took off the lenses. The three men began walking through the space the police cleared, in the midst of the cheering, clamoring mob. The Commissioner and Hanley's son walked on either side of Rugger. . .

WHEN the Doctor was through, he turned to the assemblage in the large room and said, "I think it can be done. It's a badly neglected case, but it's not too late."

A great sigh went through the room. Rugger Hanley smiled and lit a cigarette. "Now that that's over, where was I?" he asked.

"You were explaining the *behla,*" someone said.

"I know that voice," said Hanley. "That's Charley." He gripped the extended hand. "Well," he continued, "I had to have something to cover up the way I was stumbling everywhere. You see, when I lost my lenses on that trip through the moons three years ago, I didn't realize how it would develop. Ten, when I found out I was getting blind by degrees, I knew it could be cured, but it would mean that I'd stop working. And if I stopped working, Ronald would have stopped going to school. So I kept right on."

"But how could you?"

"I didn't know if I could," Hanley replied. "I'd been diving through the moons for twelve years by then. I used to think that I knew those moons backwards. I knew everything about them, when they parted and made gaps, where it was, their orbits, speed, their pock-marks—every damned thing.

"The only really dangerous trip I made was the first time I went up. I went up alone that time. No ship was expected in. I said I was going up for a joy-ride, but I didn't know, exactly." He took a drag on his cigarette. "It turned out I was right. I couldn't read the little figures on the Integrator anymore, but I didn't need them. Those moons were my friends. As my eyes got worse, I couldn't read anything much, and I used to glance at things and pretend I was reading.

"I'd bump into people all the time. I'd fall over stones. But the one thing I couldn't miss were those moons. I couldn't see much, but I couldn't miss those moons. Even with my glasses on, they used to burn holes right through me when I came at them. And I knew them by then. So I kept on working. I knew I wasn't really taking chances, yet, and I was waiting for Ronald to finish.

"Then, yesterday, I was afraid I'd gone too long, and I'd be blind, and knowing the kind of kid Ronald was, I felt he'd never forgive me. I still didn't want him to find out, but I didn't know how to stop it. I thought maybe I'd go on buying *behla* everywhere, so people would always think I was drunk when I came stumbling along."

"You gave it away last night," said Commissioner Paige. "I couldn't believe you at first, but today, when I knew you hadn't had a drop in hours, and I saw you running into people on your way to the ship, I remembered how you hadn't seen me when you first came here. I had the answer then, but it was too late to stop you."

"And a good thing too," said Ronald Hanley.

"Mr. Hanley," said the Captain of the *Silverbeam,* "would you mind telling me what you were laughing about while we were diving? I still can't understand it."

A chuckle escaped Rugger Hanley. "You see, Captain," he said, "I realized then that Kieller had done the one thing that was calculated to be the end of any pilot—if he could get away with

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it, and he did, but here I was, the one man to whom the Integrator was useless, and Kieller had banked on that. He could have done any one of a dozen other things. Oh, I thought about them all while he was talking to me up there.

"He could have hurt the rockets, the chambers, the contact phone, the control board. It wouldn't have been as simple as the device of the sparkers or the lenses, but since he was taking pains enough to throw the Integrator off—a really hard job—"

"And," interrupted Paige, "accomplished with the loving co-operation of Mr. Frazer, the only man here who could get to those things."

"Yes," Hanley agreed, soberly, "I hadn't figured on Frazer, or I'd have realized what I was up against, and how wide their field was. But when Kieller showed me how they'd wasted their opportunity, throwing off the Integrator, the irony of it almost killed me."

"Ah, yes," said the Captain of the *Silverbeam,* dryly, "it almost killed us all."

There was a noise in the back of the room. Voices were being raised. Then Hanley heard Big Mike O'Shea yelling, "But I tell you it ain't *behla.* It's Irish whiskey, good clean Irish whiskey, straight from me old mother in Ireland, and Nikko and me are going to drink with Rugger Hanley if we have to kill everyone in this room."

No one in the room was killed, after all, and they were still singing an hour later. . . .

« STRANGE, BUT TRUE »

AS a general thing when we add something to something we get something. This sounds so ridiculously simply as to be axiomatic. But recent experiments have proven that this is not necessarily always the case. For in the case of sounds it has been proven that when two sounds of a certain pitch are produced the net result is silence. Also in recent lighting tests it has been demonstrated that two beams of light can be produced in such a manner that they neutralize each other and the net result is darkness. These are indeed paradoxical demonstrations, but as yet no one has succeeded in adding two and two in a manner that totals zero.

* * *

You've probably heard and read a lot about the fourth dimension. H. G. Wells, the old master of Fantasy and Science Fiction dwelt on that theme in many of his most popular stories. Many theories in connection with the whereabouts of this mysterious dimension have been advanced but Science has not as yet accepted any of them. However, those who deny the existence of a fourth dimension might have a little difficulty explaining a phenomenon which occurred more than sixty years ago on the Kansas Pacific R. R. In 1860, a freight train of thirty cars started on a run and disappeared completely. No trace of it, or its crew, has ever been discovered to this day. No one has ever advanced a logical theory as to this mysterious disappearance, so who knows? Would it be too fantastic to suggest that the fourth dimension might be the answer to this baffling problem?

* * *

Those who have had the misfortune to encounter at close hand that deceptively innocent-appearing animal, the skunk, have every reason in the world to nurture a feeling of violent ill will toward the little pest.

In all fairness, however, it must be pointed out that the much-maligned and odorous property of the lowly skunk has been instrumental in saving the lives of countless miners. For scientists have chemically reproduced this offensive odor in the compound *butyl mercaptan* and it is extensively used in large western mines where fire alarm bells could not possibly be heard over the noise of the machinery. A few drops of butyl mercaptan dropped in the air-circulating system warns the miners almost instantly of fire or cave-in or similar dangers. So the next time you catch a whiff of attar of skunk on the breeze, just remember it's an ill wind that blows no good.

* * *

And speaking of odors it might be well to point out that practically every pleasant odor known to mankind can be synthetically created from coal tar, the black, acrid-smelling liquid obtained from the distillation of bituminous coal.—*P. F. Costello.*

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THE MAN WHO MURDERED HIMSELF

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

"SOMETIMES," Interplanetary Inspector Carson told the silent room, "I wish I had myself a nice quiet sane job driving a space truck. This streamlined deduction is enough to drive a guy whacky."

Gloomily, he inspected the paper weight in his hand. The thing was a curio, an antique—a small, fat little elephant encased in glassicade and bearing the legend "GOP CONVENTION, 1940". Carson turned it over in his hand, regarding it wistfully.

"Wish I was back five centuries," he mused. "The boys had it easy then, if they'd only known it. Perry Mason, Nero Wolfe, Nick Carter, yeah, even Sherlock Holmes—what a snap they had!"

He sighed heavily, and pushed a button on his desk. In an instant the light below his telaboard glowed crimson, and the cherubic face of Brisk Haynes, his assistant, appeared.

"Yeah, Chief," Haynes said cheerfully. "Ready to go?"

Carson sighed again. "Might as well. Haven't figured out a single angle but we might as well." He rubbed the bald spot on the back of his head. "Meet me on the roof runway." He flicked the button, and the face of his assistant disappeared. . . .

"The way I see it . . ." Brisk Haynes began, when he and Carson were comfortably seated on the space train headed for Los Angeles.

"There's only one way to see it," Carson cut in dourly. "We haven't got a thing on this bird. We can go to the house, yeah. We can make a check, yeah. We can ask questions, yeah. But we don't find out anything. And all on account of this damned streamlined world. A bunch of idle rich are having a party in this fellow Dole's home. They're drinking pretty heavy, sopping up an imported brand of planet punch, and someone gets the bright idea that they should play games."

Haynes remained expectantly wordless, although he knew the case as well as his Chief.

"This guy Dole," Carson continued, "is Corporate President of Spaceways Science Institute. He remembers that his company has developed a new wrinkle which they've been going to put on the market. It's built around that recent body-switching thing-a-ma-jig."

A man was dead. You couldn't say he had murdered himself. That's just suicide. But what if the man wasn't really "himself"?

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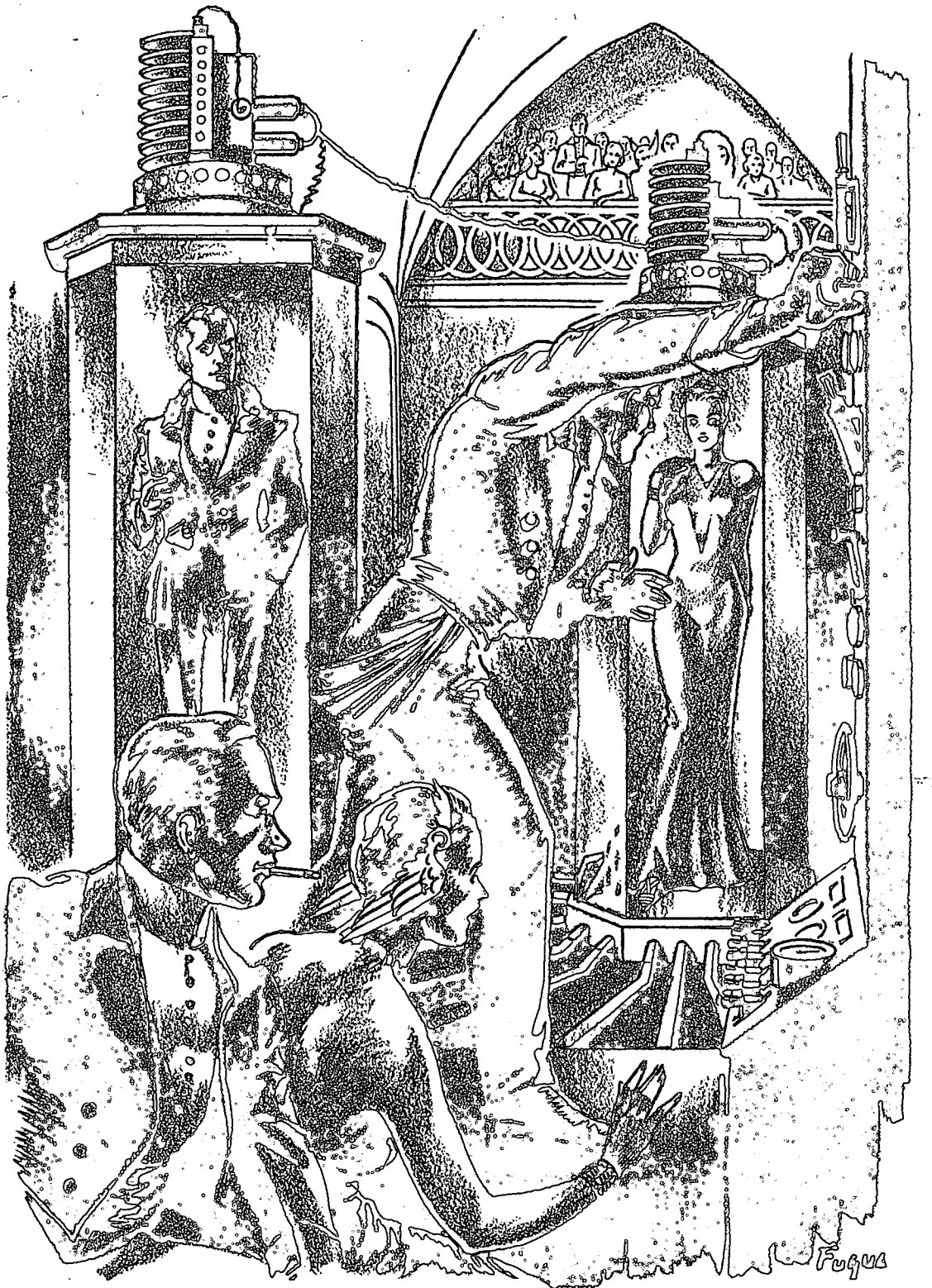

The highlight of the party was the identity-switching machine

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"Yeah," Haynes agreed. "It's been scientifically accepted for nearly a year."

"Scientifically accepted," Carson mimicked. "Damn, how I hate that phrase. It's so typical of this day an age. They develop a whosis that'll enable two people to switch bodies and no one even bats an eye over it. Just take it for granted—like that." He snapped his fingers.

"What's eating you, Chief?" Haynes asked bewilderedly.

Carson glowered at his assistant. He fished into his pocket and brought forth the tiny elephant curio.

"This thing," he said, "has made me sick. It's made me realize whatta snap the dicks had back then. Science, high-gear living. Bah, I'm getting sick of it."

Haynes remained silent, but grinned inwardly. His Chief was probably the keenest scientific Inspector in the Interplanetary Police. These periodic outbursts in which he longed for the return of "the good old days" were just a steam outlet for him.

"So," Carson went on, stuffing the curio back in his pocket. "This guy Dole—like I say—remembers that his company has made some pretty snappy strides in this body switching stuff. A perfect party game for the idle rich, see? Give them a thrill. Let them fool around with something that's been only used scientifically up until now."

Haynes nodded. "Uhhuh."

"He calls his laboratories in New York," Carson continued. "In an hour they've got all the necessary equipment out in Los Angeles, so that Dole and his ritzy chums can switch their pie-eyed bodies around for an evening's entertainment." He grimaced. "Great stuff, letting stinkos like them fool around with that sort of thing."

"Must have been some brawl," Haynes mused. "I'd kind of like to try it myself. Think of me in another body."

"Skip it," Carson said caustically. "It's bad enough as it is. Then he added: "And, incidentally, there won't be any more of that sort of thing. Not after what happened. I got in touch with Earth Commissioner this morning and got him to put a ban on the body-switch business for any purposes other than science experimentation."

"Kill joy," Haynes growled.

"I was summing up the case," Carson said acidly. "So, to get on with it, they get this body-switch business going at the party. It's great stuff. Mrs. Rujerfitt has a swell time running around in the body of Mr. Muchdough. Hilarious and all that. Up to a certain point. And that point is when they come to switch back bodies."

"They all got their own bodies back," Haynes put in.

"Yeah, all but Dole and another guy—a fella named Sturgess. They're walking up on the roof garden part of the time. Both of them are tanked. Dole is in Sturgess' body, and Sturgess is in Dole's. That's when Sturgess, in Dole's body, decides to walk the ledge on the roof. Dole, in the body of Sturgess, bets him he can't."

"Well?" Haynes knew the answer, but he also knew he was supposed to ask.

"He can't," Carson remarked tersely. "While he's weaving along the edge, he falls off."

Haynes frowned. "Dammit, now I'm mixed up. *Who* falls off?"

"Sturgess falls off," Carson said. "Sturgess in Dole's body. And that's the end of Sturgess, and of Dole's body. That's how come Sturgess and Dole don't get a chance to switch back. That's how come Dole is stuck with his chum's body right now. That's how

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come we gotta run our legs off making an investigation—because Dole, in Sturgess' body, pulls wires with the Commissioner to have the thing certified and cleared."

Haynes sighed. "Now I'm twice as muddled."

"Then wait till we're there," Carson answered. . . .

CARSON and Haynes entered the luxurious study of Martin Dole several hours later. They had been admitted by a squat, Venusian houseboy who disappeared, leaving them alone in the room.

"Some joint," Haynes remarked. "Wish I was one of the idle rich. If I was, I'd retire, take me an interplanetary cruise ship and find some nice—"

"I've been here once before," Carson broke in. He was looking at the bookcases, at the trophies and knick-knacks along the tops of them. "Used to know Dole's old man before he died a few years back." He frowned. "Never thought his worthless son would get himself into this kind of a mess. But that's this str—"

"Streamlined world," Haynes finished for him, grinning.

Carson glowered, removing his coat and placing it along the back of a chair.

"Didn't see young Dole's wife around. She must be going a bit daffy over it all."

"Wouldn't blame her," Haynes began. "I know if I—"

He was interrupted by the sound of the door behind them being opened. They both wheeled, to see a tall, blond moustached fellow standing there. He was dressed in an ill-fitting smoking robe.

"How do you do," he said. "You're Carson, I believe?" He spoke to Carson in a jerky fashion, and his face was strained.

"This is Haynes, my assistant," Carson replied. "And I take it that you're Martin Dole."

The tall blond nodded. "Yes, but looking a bit differently since the tragedy."

"You mean that the body you happen to be wearing at the moment happened to have once belonged to a fellow named Sturgess, eh?"

Dole nodded, and sat down gesturing Carson and Haynes to chairs across from him.

"Yeah," Carson's voice contained no sympathy. "I know all about it. Some party, eh?"

The lines on Dole's face—or, rather, on Sturgess'—grew tighter, and he gulped nervously. He looked like a man on the point of a complete breakdown.

"We were drinking heavily," he said. His voice was husky. "I never would have hit on such an idea if we hadn't been. I realize now how foolish, how horrible—"

"But it's too late now," Carson broke in calmly. "Perhaps you can tell us what happened on the roof."

Dole seemed to take a grip on himself.

"You'll excuse my state of nerves, gentlemen," he began. "This having a different body, plus the fact that your very best friend was killed through your own foolishness, can play hell with you." His hands trembled slightly. Then:

"It was after our switching of bodies. As I said, I'd been—we all had been—drinking heavily. Sturgess and I decided to take a breath of air up on the roof. He was in my body and I was in his."

Carson nodded. "Obviously. You still are."

"Well," Dole went on, "we were

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alone up there, kidding one another rather drunkenly about the deficiencies of our respective bodies. I told him that being in his body made me realize how fine my own body was, and all that sort of thing. He said that my body couldn't stand liquor as well as his. He said he'd prove it by walking the ledge. We were drunk. I let him. He fell!" Dole's last words seemed to have been husked from him, and he put his head in his hands, shaking.

"He fell," Carson echoed, "in your body. You were left, trapped in the body of Sturgess, so to speak."

Dole nodded. "I have to have this thing cleared up. My wife and all my friends know, of course. And I don't see how we can keep from unfavorable publicity. But I must go on—even though I've a different body now. I had the Commissioner send you down here to give the accident as clean a bill of health as possible. You can talk to any other people who were at the party, if you'd like. But, somehow, things have to be regulated. I have to go on—" his words trailed off lamely.

CARSON rose.

"It won't be necessary to talk to any of them. Got in touch with six or seven by telaboard this morning. Their stories seem the same. Sturgess' death was undoubtedly an accident. You're right about the publicity, there'll be plenty of it. I'm sorry, for I knew your father. But you have it coming to you."

Dole nodded.

"I know I have." His voice was a half sob.

Carson had advanced to the bookcases, was reaching for his coat, which he'd thrown over a chair, when he paused. He picked a tiny knife off the shelf, turning it over in his hands.

"An odd piece," he remarked. "You must have been a collector, like your father."

Dole nodded.

"I got that in Titan," he acknowledged. "Picked up most of that stuff during my interplanetary travels."

Carson nodded, eyes searching the shelf until he reached out and brought down a tiny earthen mug. He held it out.

"This, too, I suppose?"

"Yes," Dole acknowledeged. "Picked up that piece while I was on a trip through Juno." He seemed suddenly impatient, and a little puzzled.

Carson picked up his coat, started to turn, then reached for the shelf once more.

"Say," he murmured, "this thing is really odd," he held out a piece to Dole. "Where did you get this?"

Haynes, who had been waiting at the door, started to say something, then clamped his jaws.

Dole had risen. He looked at the object Carson held in his hands.

"Oh that," he shrugged. "It has a little value. Got it on a trip through Venus. It was given to me by an old—"

But Dole got no farther. Carson had drawn an atomic pistol from inside his coat.

"Hold that so-and-so!" he snapped to Haynes. "We'll need him for the murder of Martin Dole!"

Haynes acted quickly, and after a brief scuffle, had the prisoner in handcuffs. . . .

CARSON and Haynes were on the space train, heading home from Los Angeles. Now and then Carson's assistant looked at him with a sort of speculative awe.

"That was a neat trick, Chief," Haynes said at last. "But how in the hell did you dope it out?"

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Carson finished lighting a rank Venusian cigar.

"Simple," he grunted. "When I got in touch with the rich rascals who'd been at Dole's party, I found out that there was a certain vagueness about the events during and after the body-switching. They were all so drunk that everything was hazy, and anything would have gone by them without their knowing it. Then, too, the accident on the roof seemed too pat."

Haynes nodded.

"So a little checking on the telaboard revealed that this Sturgess guy was nuts about Dole's wife, and vice-versa. Sturgess didn't have much dough, so he couldn't take Dole's wife and keep her in any style. She's expensive. The body-switch gave them their chance."

"Yeah, but—" Haynes began.

"As I was saying," Carson glared. "The body switch gave them their chance. Sturgess and Dole's wife had stayed pretty sober.

"Sturgess was clever. Clever enough to know that such a wild scheme might work. So he and Dole didn't switch bodies. While Dole was drunk, Sturgess—pretending that he'd switched with Dole—took Dole up on the roof and pushed him off.

"But they hadn't changed?"

"Of course not. Only the people at the party thought that they had. They thought that Dole was in the body of Sturgess. But he wasn't. It was Sturgess just as he'd always been. However, he pretended to be Dole, now."

"But how—" Haynes began.

"Willya listen?" Carson barked. "Sturgess was smart, he knew almost everything about Dole. Everything down to tiny personal habits. He must have suspected we were trying to trap him when I forced him to identify the knick-knacks on the mantel. Only Dole would be able to do so, and remember them rightly."

"But didn't Sturgess identify them?" Haynes asked. "Those first ones, I mean?"

Carson shrugged.

"How in the hell do I know? He was probably making it up as he went along. But when I showed him this," Carson dug into his pocket and pulled forth a tiny object, "and he pretended to remember where he'd gotten it, I knew it was Sturgess and not Dole."

Haynes looked at the little curio in Carson's palm. An antique, a little elephant encased in glassicade. It bore the legend, "GOP CONVENTION, 1940."

Carson sighed.

"They had it soft in those days—Nero Wolfe, Perry Mason, yeah, and even Sherlock Holmes!"

The End.

« « FANTASTIC ODDITIES » »

POPPING OFF

Although few people are aware of it, almost any material substance has the potentiality of explosion. Some of the most unexpected explosions of odd substances have occurred in freshly mined diamonds, elephant ivory that has been suddenly chilled, and dried milk dust!

COUNTING ATOMS

The principle by which atoms are counted is not different from that used by a farmer who wishes to count the sheep in a large flock? The sheep herder counts the sheep in a carefully measured square and then multiplies that figure by the area the herd covers. In measuring atoms the scientist first measures a small hole in a screen. Then the so-called "alpha particles" which are really helium atoms, are bombarded against this screen from a measured surface of radium. By this method it has been ascertained that a cubic centimeter of helium gas contains (take a deep breath now) 2,560,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms. Figures like these are meaningless to use for our minds balk at the attempt to visualize their almost infinite scope. Their unbelievable enormity can better be appreciated by means of this illustration. If the atoms of helium gas in a pellet the size of a pea pod, were to be released at the rate of a thousand a second, about two thousand million years would have elapsed before the last atom escaped!

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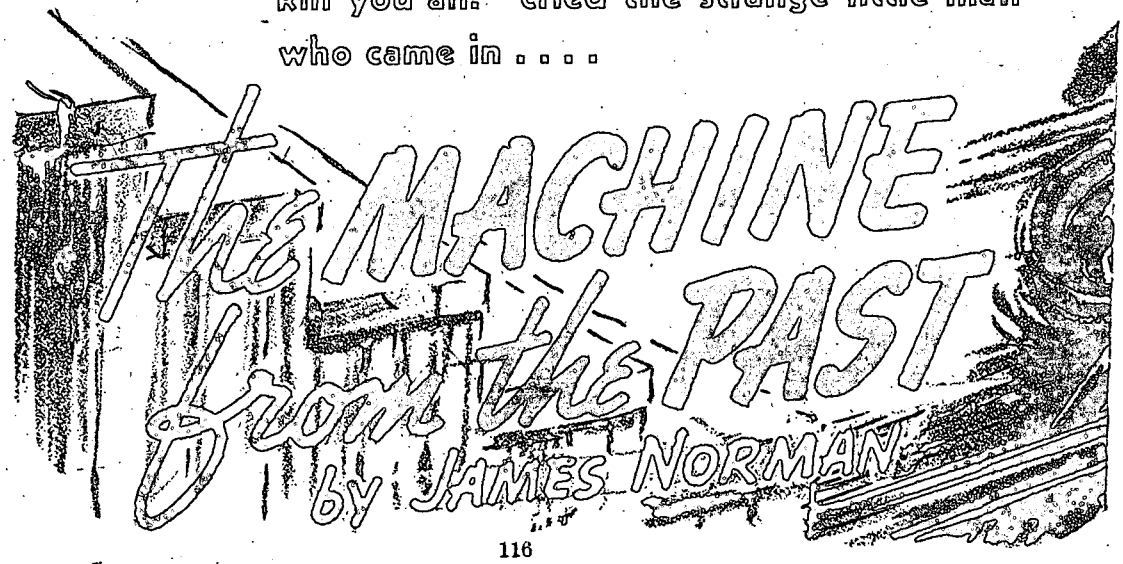
"YOUR city is doomed! Warn the people! The volcano is about to erupt and kill you all!" cried the strange little man who came in . . . .



The MACHINE from the PAST

by JAMES NORMAN

DEIMOS was the strangest little man Officer Gilbert had ever seen. He fished him out of the lake, drenched, teeth chattering and face as cold and gray as the dawn. Scrambling up the pier ladder he staggered to his feet, then looked around in bewilderment at the maze of docks, the shipping gear and the mist-shrouded city skyline beyond.

Gilbert blinked his eyes incredulously. He could have sworn that he had seen the little man swim in—as if from beyond the lake horizon. *But there was no boat out there!* Not even a drifting log!

"What the hell were you doing out there?" he demanded. "Don't you know there's an ordinance against swimming around the docks?"

The little man clenched his fists to control the involuntary chattering of his teeth. His jaw undershot his face like a spade and it grew rigid as he tried to speak.

"The volcano!" he gasped. "We've got to warn them! The city will be destroyed!"

Officer Gilbert's huge frame shook with the latent beginnings of anger.

"Volcano!" he exploded brusquely. "None o' that now. What's your name?"

"Deimos," answered the little man with an accent that was distinctly foreign. "But where am I?" he added hastily.

"Cleveland," said Gilbert.

"C - C - Clev - land? There was a puzzled light in the little man's eyes as they swept toward the city's skyline. Suddenly he grabbed the officer's arm and began tugging vehemently. "There is no time to lose. We must warn them. East of the city—the volcano."

"Volcano?" Gilbert grunted. "Say, what the hell is this?"

"It's going to erupt—the volcano," Deimos pleaded excitedly. "I saw it erupt and bury the entire city! I managed to escape only in time. But I've come back to save the girl and to

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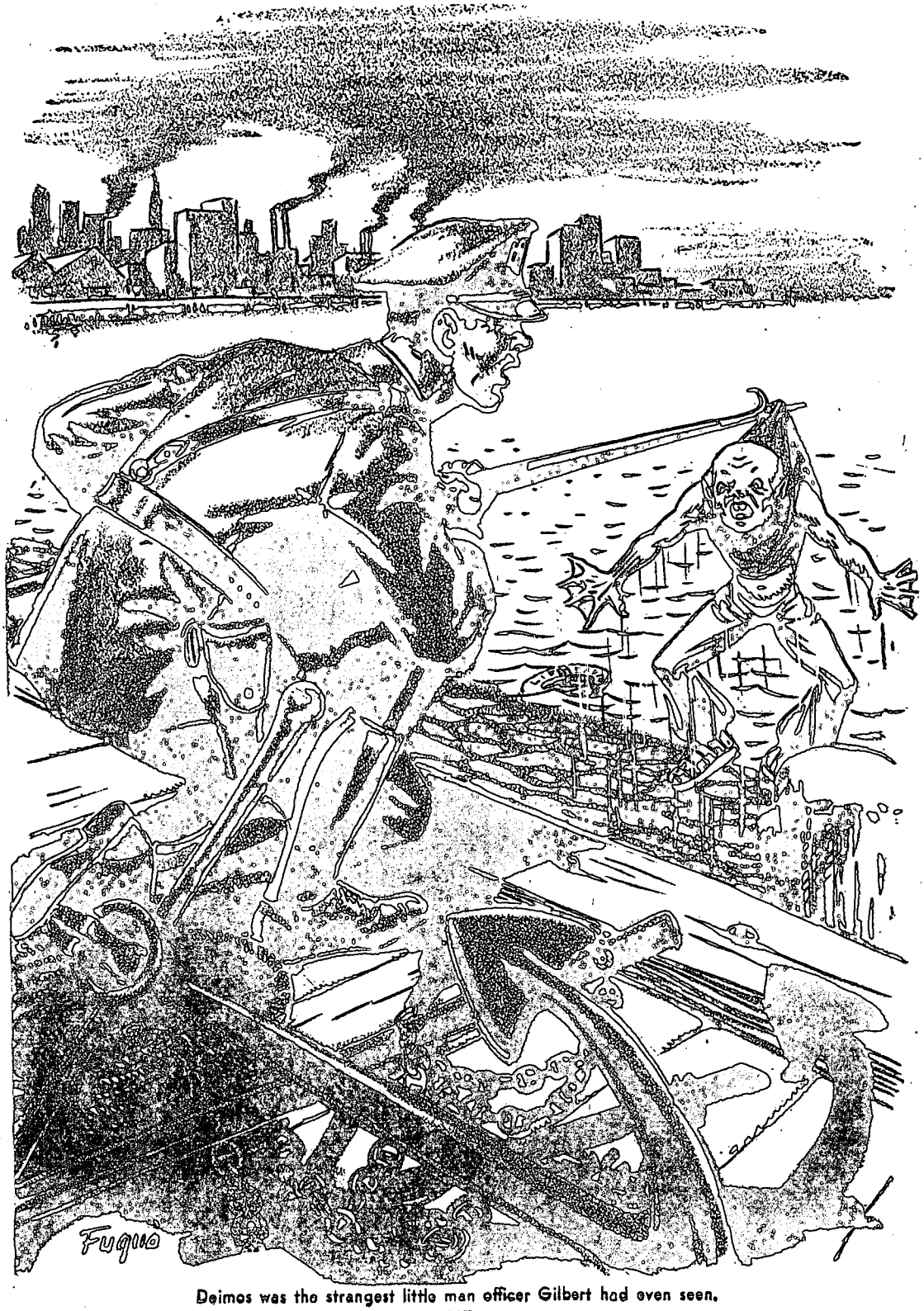

Deimos was the strangest little man officer Gilbert had even seen.

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warn the people. I tell you we must hurry! It's to the east."

He tugged at the officer's arm in desperation. Gilbert yanked himself free and backed away a step. He scowled suspiciously at the agitated little man.

"There's no volcano around here," he said.

"I tell you there is!" screamed the little man.

Officer Gilbert's eyes narrowed, becoming aware of the little man's clothing. It was of a curious cut: short sleeveless jacket and loose knee-length trousers of a silken material. The shoes seemed to be made of metal.

Suddenly it occurred to the officer to humor the little man.

"Okay, we'll talk about the volcano later," he spoke in a voice normally reserved for children. "Now, tell me, what's your name?"

"Deimos."

"Deimos what?"

"Never mind," the little man answered hastily. "We must warn them of the volcano. Quick!"

"Say, where the devil are you from?" demanded Gilbert.

The little man's lips twisted nervously while his eyes leaped excitedly from the city to the policeman and back.

"I'm Deimos—from the year 2020," he said. "I came back here in a time-piston. It was wrecked and sank into the bay there. I managed to escape and swim into shore. Now will you come?"

Deimos started at Gilbert a moment. The officer watched him in a hawkish manner that brooded ill. The little man edged away nervously. In a flash, he ducked under the big officer's arms and ran up the dock toward the city.

"You can't stop me," he shouted. "I must warn them of the volcano before it's too late again. I'm sane, I tell you!"

His metal shoes clicked over the planking, ringing in the cold morning air. Officer Gilbert's heavier boots thundered behind him. Deimos glanced back over his shoulder for a bare instant. He saw the officer tugging at his pistol as he ran.

Racing across the pier-end, Deimos cut behind a warehouse. He could hear the officer coming, gaining on him. He hurried up a series of stairs, leaped a low stone fence and ran across Lakeside Drive.

Zzzing! a bullet hummed a deathly melody above his head. He swerved to the left and ran with renewed energy. Then, abruptly, he banged into something that was yielding, yet solid. Staggering back, gasping for breath, dizzy from the shock, his befuddled gaze framed the figure of another policeman.

THE pot-bellied turnkey at the Euclid Avenue police station wobbled toward cell number 3. Fitting a key in the cell lock, he swung the door open and turned toward the thin man who followed him.

"He's harmless," said the turnkey. "He gabs a lot. He'll give you a good story, but you'd better be through before the guards come to take him off to the nut house."

"Thanks." The thin man slipped a five to the turnkey. The cell door closed behind him as he entered. A half-smile flickered across his lips as he stared at Diemos.

"I'm Thomas of the Daily Record," he said. "You seem to be in quite a fix. Anything I can do?"

"Get me out of here!" Deimos suddenly shouted. "They think I'm mad—I'm not! The volcano! Can't they understand it's going to erupt. It's going to blow the entire countryside apart. It'll bury the cities! I must get out!"

He began shaking the bars in the cell

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door with all his strength.

"Take it easy," said the reporter. "What the hell is this all about?"

Deimos threw a scornful glance toward the other and began pacing the floor. He beat one fist into the palm of the other and glared at the reporter.

"You don't believe I've come out of the future either, do you?" he asked. "You think the volcano to the east is harmless, don't you?"

The reporter grinned and flicked a cigarette into his mouth.

"Say, I'll believe anything—if there's a story in it," he said. "Tell me, how'd you get here?"

Deimos halted his pacing for an instant while he shot a penetrating glance at the reporter.

"That's right," he said. "I forget that you people have not reached the scientific level achieved by our men of the twenty-first century. You're ignorant concerning atoms, electricity, time-travel."

"Just as you say," nodded Thomas.

"Well, many generations in the future—the year 2000 A.D. in fact—men discovered a means of traveling into the past, into almost any year of past history. We invented an atomic piston. Change of time is merely a re-arrangement of molecular and atomic structures. Our time-piston takes an atomic structure such as myself from one period of time and thrusts it into the structure of another period . . . but this is perhaps too complicated for your undeveloped science to understand."

"Yeah, get on the volcano. We haven't much time," said the reporter, glancing through the cell door to see if anyone approached.

"Using a time-piston, although they're not perfected yet in 2020, I set my time meter," Deimos continued.

"Time meter?"

"Yes," Deimos nodded abruptly. "It's a small, octagon shaped meter with dates engraved on it. It's attached to the outer surface of the piston, a capusule-form machine. With it we set the period of journey into the past. I arrived here, or a smaller city to the east of this. It was near the volcano."

The reporter arched his brow quizically.

"Which volcano?" he asked.

"You ought to know," Deimos snapped. "At the moment of my arrival it was smoking and throwing flaming bits of rock into the sky as it is doing at this very moment. The people of the city, however, seemed undisturbed. They did not realize . . . in fact, you don't yet realize what horror is going to sweep down upon you."

The little man's face suddenly turned pallid. Grasping the cell bars, he rattled them desperately.

"I've got to get out," he screamed. "Someone has to believe me! I must save her!"

THOMAS, the reported, leaped to the little man's side. "Calm down," he snaped. "Who's this woman you're talking about?"

"Will you help her? Will you warn her?" Deimos asked hopefully.

"Yeah," said Thomas, sinking back on the bunk. "Where is she?"

The little man wrung his hands nervously.

"I neutralized my time-piston near a well at the outskirts of the city just as the volcano spread a shower of soft ashes over the country side. I saw a girl drawing water at the well—a beautiful girl. She wore a silver-bordered tunic and a small band of gold leaves in her dark hair.

"She was at first frightened when I stepped out of my time-machine. Then, upon seeing I was human and a

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stranger, she smiled. There was more than friendly interest in that warm smile. . . . If I could have only saved her then, before it was too late! If I had only known then. . . ."

"Better hurry," the reporter interrupted.

"The girl smiled, but suddenly her eyes harbored stark terror! The earth began to shake at its very foundations. The volcano, some distance beyond the city, erupted with a shocking series of concussions. The mountain crown blasted away. Fire swept across the somber sky in hues of angry purple and yellow. People in the city staggered about in horror and agony. Molten rocks thundered into the city like a cannonade blasted out by the artillery of the primal gods.

"I was struck down by the first concussion. I heard the girl at the well scream. Gaining my feet, I stumbled toward her as she ran into a nearby house. Reaching the gateway, my heart sank. Ugly cracks split the walls and roof of the house, throwing down showers of dust and rubble. Then, before my horrified eyes, the building crumbled inward, crushing those within under tons of mortar, brick and volcanic refuse.

"Almost blind, I somehow managed to reach my time-piston. I had only the slimmest margin of time in which to escape; still, the thought of the girl held me there. My mind worked in a desperate, split-second fashion. I had to save her—and there was only one way."

Deimos glanced at the news reporter dramatically. The reporter raised his brows critically, waiting.

"I took a desperate chance," the little man continued as he paced the floor. "I reset my time meter. Reset it for the same year, but so that I might voyage only a day into the past. I planned to rescue the girl and warn the people in time. It was a dangerous attempt. Our time meters sometimes fail. I took the risk, chancing the margin of error. If my meter failed I could have been plunged again into the midst of the eruption.

"So here I am. I succeeded. I must get away from here! The people must be warned! Another few hours and it will be too late."

DEIMOS halted his story abruptly. He stared at the reporter earnestly. There was something in the news man's expression that unnerved him.

"You think I'm mad, too! You don't believe I've come back from the future?" he screamed hysterically.

"Got any proof?" the reporter shrugged.

"Proof!" shouted Deimos. "My time-piston was smashed. It's in the bay. Go fish for it! By that time we'll all be dead!"

"You mean the lake?"

"You must believe me! I must reach her side before the volcano erupts." the little man began pleading. *"You've got to believe me!"*

"I believe anything — if there's a story in it," the reporter answered drily. "I'll be damned if I don't think there's a wow of a story in this. . . ." He stepped to the cell door, glanced up the passageway, then turned toward Deimos. "Listen," he said tensely. "I want a story—a good human interest story. You've got it. The Don Duixote stuff . . . saving a pretty gal . . . horrible menace . . . fighting windmills and so on."

The little man looked puzzled.

"You'll help me?" he cried hopefully.

"Yeah," replied the reporter. "I'm going to park in the outer office. When the asylum guards come, I'll try stalling them as long as I can. You get out of here. I'll tag along once you get out-

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side. Where is this volcano of yours?"

"East." Deimos glanced toward the cell window. Beyond it the sky was heavy with soot and smoke belching from a dozen factory stacks. "It's starting—the volcano!" he cried.

"Okay," the reporter cut in. "The walls of this klink are made of soft stone. Here's my nail file and pocket knife. You can dig out one of the window-bars. When you're free, don't go hopping off to a tavern. I want adventure, human interest. And if they catch you—we just ain't never met! Get that?"

The news reporter whistled for the turnkey and a moment later Deimos began working with frantic haste. The stone in which the window bars were impaled was weatherworn and soft. Ten minutes of scrapping and digging loosened one of the bars from its anchorage.

The drop from the window to the wall, then to the deserted alley behind the police station was but a moment's work.

Something jerked his arm violently. It was Thomas, the reporter.

"Step on it. They've gone into your cell," he yelled. "Now, what — little man?"

"We must warn the populace," Deimos cried. His anxious eyes swept toward both ends of the alley. Then he ran with startling speed. "The church . . . the bell tower . . . a peal of warning."

"My God—what a story!" gasped the reporter as he followed the little man through the church entrance and up the spiral stairway into the belfry.

A MOMENT later the deep clangor of tower bells pealed through the city. The bell sound increased in violence, clashing upon the ears of the pedestrians in the streets below. Five minutes . . . seven . . . ten . . . It swelled to a maddening thunder. People clutched their hands to their ears. Others swore at the bells. There had never been a peal rung like that in all the city's history. It became maddening.

In the bell tower, Thomas the news reporter clung to the belfry beams for support and gaped at the most amazing sight he had ever seen. "The little guy's mad — madder than a march hare," he muttered fearfully.

Deimos hung from a bell rope, swung back and forth like a fantastic human pendulum, bringing the bells into motion. He swung from one rope to another in the midst of the most unearthly din. Then he raced to the tower windows, shouting frantic warnings to the people in the streets below. His high-pitched, hysterical voice was engulfed by the iron roar of the bells and became a nothingness cast into the sky.

"The volcano!" he shouted. "Run . . . there's no time . . . save yourselves!"

The bell thunder washed away his voice until his mouth shaped a mere mockery of words.

Suddenly he released the bell ropes and stumbled down the belfry stairs in mad flight. Thomas, the reporter, shook the dizziness from his head and followed. Glancing from a window he saw the police closing in on the church.

Deimos burst from the doorway just as a cordon of blue coats approached.

"You can't stop me!" he screamed, his voice carrying upward to a thin hysterical pitch. He cut across the church yard, eluding the police for a moment.

A police billy whizzed past his head and bounced on the pavement to his right.

"The volcano—" he gasped.

He gained a dozen yards and lost them again as a squad car roared in pursuit. The siren, wailing at his back,

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added energy to his desperate sprint eastward. But suddenly, a dozen policemen swept down upon him.

A club crashed with a glancing blow across his neck and shoulders. He staggered. For an instant he was down on his knees. Then, as if forced on by some fanatic inner urge, he crawled on hands and knees.

Finally the police stopped him. It took four men, for Deimos bit and scratched and wriggled, trying to shake them loose. He shouted hoarsly, his voice growing weaker, cracking.

"The volcano—I've got to save her! . . . I must . . . warn . . ."

He struggled as they laced him in a straight jacket He was raving when they carried him into the asylum ambulance.

"He's the worst case we've had," said one of the guards. "You'd think he had something on his mind."

Reporter Thomas shrugged.

"You'd think he really knew about volcanoes the way he went to bat for one," he observed drily. "But Lord—what a story! I'd give my right eye if a nut like the little guy would escape every day."

OFFICER GILBERT rested one large policeman's foot on a capstan and viewed with interest the bustling activity aboard the harbor service barge that slowly chugged away from the docks.

"Where you going, Mike?" he shouted to one of the seamen.

"Work," answered the seaman. He lazily wound in a hauser-line trailing in the water. "Gotta grapple for the buoy that sunk an quarter mile out channel. Want to come.

Officer Gilbert did not respond. He made a funny little noise in his throat as he watched the barge pull out. He was still wondering about the little guy with the gray face, undershot jaw and funny clothing and this made him think of it.

"Damn odd," he muttered, turning back to his beat. "Where the hell did he swim in from?"

Meanwhile, aboard the service barge, Mike watched the harbor cop's huge figure dwindle upon the dock.

"Poor Gilbert," he grunted, "this cop business ain't much fun." He spat into the lake water and turned his attention to the winches.

A short crane swung over the slate water, grappling hooks dangling from the cable end. Mike jerked the chock from the windlass and let the hooks plunge into the water.

"Drag?" shouted the donkey-man.

"Ten foot . . . fifteen . . . twenty . . . twenty-two . . ." Mike called the numbers mechanically.

Suddenly the crane cable stiffened.

"Contact!" yelled Mike.

The donkey-man set his engine throbbing. The cable grew taut. The engine tugged and slipped, grawling like an old dog. Then, abruptly, the grapple slipped. The engine race madly, winding in cable.

In the claws of the grapple as it came to the surface, was a strange object. It had been torn from some larger mechanism. Mike pulled it on deck and examined it; an octogan shaped meter with lines etched upon the metal surface. Dates.

"What are those numbers?" asked the donkey-man.

Mike turned the meter over in his hand. Its pointer had been exactly set upon a certain number—79 A.D. Mike shrugged, handed the meter to the donkey-man who looked at it, then tossed it overboard .

"That ain't part of the buoy," said the donkey-man disgustedly. "Maybe the buoy drifted."

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"Yeah," said Mike. "—79 A.D. Gee, that's kind of familiar. I went to school once. Yeah, that date was important . . . ah . . . Yeah, that was when the volcano, Vesuvius, exploded and covered a whole city at one whack."

"So what?" growled the donkey-man, looking upon Mike's smattering of education with suspicion. "So what?"

"Nothing," answered Mike.

(Concluded from page 6)

Kansas City, Missouri—Mr. Joseph T. Cousins spent a cold, gray dawn on the morning following the theft of the furnace from the basement of his home!

Miami, Florida—A ten-ton steam roller was stolen from the Homestead Machinery Company!

Paris, France—An entire house was stolen during the absence of its owner, who returned the next morning to find nothing but the foundation of his domicile remaining!

Concord, Massachusetts—The steeple of the First Parish Church in Concord was looted of $500.00 worth of gold leaf which had served as its proud and gleaming adornment!

What is this, a gang of interplanetary, or extra-dimensional, thieves? Sometimes we wonder why we publish this magazine!

BLIND as a bat, you say? Well, you ought to have a bat's ears then! Here's a bit of truth abouts bats that's fantastic enough to bear our editorial scrutiny.

Experiments recently conducted at the Harvard Physics Laboratory show for the first time how bats avoid objects in the dark. In flight, it was proved that they emit a continuous series of shrill cries, on a sound-wave band of between thirty and seventy thousand vibrations per second. Sound echoes reflect back from obstacles ahead, warning the bat to veer aside. The human ear, with a top pitch of twenty thousand vibrations per second, cannot detect these cries.

$20,000,000.00 found in a shark! Oh, you don't believe it? Well listen to this:

Fishermen and canners along the California coast are now developing a shark liver industry. Pinback, grayfish, bonita, thrasher or whiptail, and leopard sharks have livers rich with vitamin A, but by golly, the soupfin shark tops 'em all! The liver oil, undiluted, or added to other compounds is a potent health restorer.

Rather unironically, these sharks are *not* man-eaters. So maybe *they* have a kick coming!

The industry has more to it than oil, though. Sharkskin is made into shoes and traveling bags; teeth become novel jewelry; fins appeal to the Chinese as soup stock; and shark flesh, finely ground up, "hamburger a la stockyard," is an exceptionally fine livestock feed!

ANISEIKONIA. No, it's not a Martian world meaning "keep off the grass." It's a good part of the reason for the bad eyesight of twenty-five million Americans who wear glasses, and thirty-five million more who should. This new eye-trouble with the fantastic name was first discovered in 1934 by Dartmouth research scientists and is now being treated by means of newly developed aniseikonic lenses. The Greeks gave us the word (they seem to have a word for everything even before it's discovered!), aniseikonia meaning "unequal images." It means that each eye sees the object in a different size and shape. (Remember how things look after the third Zombie?)

Symptoms of this defect are headaches, stomach and nerve disorders. A highly complex instrument, like an author's nightmare in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, is used to detect the defect.

So, readers, maybe just seeing this instrument is compensation for having "aniseikonia"!

JUST to keep the "merchants of death" happy, the 1917 scarcity of glycerin can now be avoided. They used to get it out of the by-product of the soap-making industry. Now it can be made from petroleum. Now we can go "bang-bang" with no thought of a shortage of the wherewithal of detonation!

HERE'S another item to make the Nazis jealous. We, our scientists, that is, have developed a substitute (ersatz) China wood oil. It's called "tung oil" usually. The substitute is extracted from a bean grown by American farmers.

What is there about tung oil that makes it important? Well, traffic lacquer for highway stripping is made from it. And, as you know, the roads must roll.

The new bean product, however, is superior and almost fifty percent cheaper. Eventually its growth will add $20,000,000.00 to the income of our farms.

Which reminds us that paltry sum is getting just a bit monotonous. Shark oil, tung oil—science sure is greasy, isn't it?

HERE'S more about U-235. It seems we'll get more than atomic power out of the darn stuff! American scientists have found a way to disintegrate U-235, so that in the process of releasing its power, six different elements are yielded as a by-product. They are: iodine, xenon, cesium, lanthanum, cerium, and molybdenum. Handy discovery, eh?

And with that, we'll be going. This is where we came in. See you *next month*. *Rap*

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MR. DUFFY'S OTHER LIFE

by ARTHUR T. HARRIS

How many of us said: "If I had my life to live over, and knew what I know now, I'd do much differently!"? Mr. Duffy said that too, but . . .

WITH a scowl on his face *this* big, Sam Duffy stalked grumpily into the dining room.

"Oh dear," murmured the long-suffering Mrs. Duffy, half aloud, "Sam's had another bad day at the office."

"What's that?" growled Duffy, his head jerking up. "Always that infernal mumbling. It's enough to drive a saint to drink."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Duffy said meekly. "Yes, indeed."

It was always that way with the Duffys. It had been that way now for the past fifteen years. Because, Duffy thought, his whole life had been a mistake.

He'd wanted to be a doctor; he'd wound up as an accountant. He wanted to marry young into a wealthy family; instead he'd waited till he was thirty-two, and his spouse had been a sweet little home-body, not a glamour girl.

Yes, his whole life had been wasted, and now he was forty-seven and merely another cog in the white-collar machine. And not a very important cog at that.

"I wish you'd fix something that I like, for a change," Duffy complained, glaring up from a deliciously browned slice of pot roast.

"But you *ordered* a roast this morning!" Mrs. Duffy squeaked desperately.

"Well, it's overdone! Maybe it's under-done! Anyway, it's lousy!" Duffy barked, and went into the living room to punish his five-cent cigar.

Mrs. Duffy sighed unhappily and began clearing away the dishes. Something had come over Duffy, of late. Nowadays he even growled in his sleep.

The doorbell, ringing timidly, broke into her morbid thoughts. A young man was on the porch; a young man lugging a funny looking contraption, a heavy, boxlike affair which looked like a cross between a radio and a small-scale X-ray machine.

Mrs. Duffy eyed him nervously.

"We really don't need anything today," she apologized: "Maybe you can come back next week—"

The young man smiled at her reassuringly and walked inside.

"What the hell do you want?" came a bellicose roar, as Duffy came charging into the hallway. "Beulah, what

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Mr. Duffy stared into the whirling mirror in amazement.

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is the meaning of this?"

"I really don't know," cried his flustered wife. "I tried to tell him—"

"It isn't her fault, you know," the young man said abruptly, calmly, in fact quite charmingly. "I have to make a demonstration tonight. I'm sure everything will turn out all right."

He was a blond young man, and he cast a spell as intangible as the quiet challenge of his steady blue eyes. Duffy, glaring at him, swallowed a couple of times.

"Well, be quick about it," he growled. "But I'm telling you right off the bat, you're wasting your time. I'm broke."

The young man turned to the open-mouthed Mrs. Duffy and said:

"I'll only be with your husband a few moments," he explained.

"Oh!" breathed the browbeaten spouse. Taking the hint, she scurried back to her dishes.

IN the living room, the young man cleared ashtrays and bric-a-brac from an end table. In their place he plumped down the odd-looking contraption and plugged it into a wall socket.

"Now," he said, turning to the truculent Duffy, "Mr. Duffy, step closer, please. I want you to examine this time-machine."

"A time-machine?" gasped Duffy. "You mean—it *can* be done?"

The young man smiled knowingly.

"You will see," he said softly.

Duffy gasped. It was all true, then. Each night for years, after Mrs. Duffy had trooped forlornly off to bed, he'd delved deep into the pages of science fiction magazines.

He'd found solace in imagining himself as a future Dictator of the Spaceways, zipping across the void in streamlined rocket ships as a conquering hero. And now, God forbid, pseudo-science had turned right around and was paying him off in its own coin!

He goggled at the apparatus. It had an amazingly intricate hodge-podge of condensers, tubes and connecting wires. A circular disk like a loudspeaker, with a little central knob below it, was affixed into the front panel.

But it was like no loudspeaker Duffy had ever seen. The cone was plated with tiny circular mirrors, and in the very center was a little bulb, which looked like the conventional electric-eye.

Duffy stared and stared. Why, with this machine he could live his life over, correct his mistakes. Knowing what he knew now, he could . . .

His eyes grew wide with incredulity. And as they gazed into the cone, fascinated, the young man, with a little flick of his hand, turned the knob.

The bulb began to glow, waveringly at first; then it shone forth with all the brilliant, coruscating colors of a magic spectrum. The circular mirrors refleted back the color-waves in a kaleidoscope of ever-increasing tempo.

A kaleidoscope that began, gradually, to march back through the years, projecting a series of pictures, now dim and now clear, in which Duffy saw himself again as a man of forty, a bridegroom of thirty-two—and a young man of eighteen, good-looking, ambitious, eager.

* * *

"SAM," said his father worriedly, "I don't think you should do it. Your mother and I, we've got the money for you, yes. Been saving it for you since you were a little shaver. But now—well, things just haven't worked out that way."

Sam Duffy's eyes glowed challengingly.

"Dad, I've set a goal for myself, and

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nothing is going to stop me. I'm going to medical school, I'm going to be a doctor, and I'm going to marry a rich girl, so she can set me up in practice."

"On Park Avenue?" snorted his father, resenting the boy's calculating attitude.

"Why not?" said young Sam Duffy. "I've got what it takes!"

His father's eyes were bitter.

"That's just it, Sam. You're bright, yes. But not thorough. You do things too much in a hurry. You're impatient; you hate to grind away at a job. Being a doctor, son, is the toughest job in the world. You've got to be so darn careful what you do."

Sam's eyes were ice cold, determined.

"But it's still my money, isn't it?" he purred.

THE DEAN OF the College of Medicine looked up as Sam Duffy, twenty-six years old, strode confidently past the door.

"Duffy," said the dean kindly, "I thought it might be well to have a little talk with you. You know, there's a lot more to being a doctor than knowing anatomy and various diseases and the right medicines to prescribe."

"Have I failed in any of my final tests?" Duffy sneered politely.

The dean's mouth hardened.

"You know you haven't. The point is, you do just enough work to get by. You're brilliant, Duffy—that's the trouble. I ought not to recommend you for graduation, but I can't help myself. You've done all the required work. But that's just it. That's all you've done."

He eyed the arrogant young man earnestly, worriedly.

"Duffy, it's the *extra* work, the *extra* care that makes a good doctor. Just getting by is not sufficient. You've got to be thoroughly competent in the bargain. Because, Duffy, the medical world will allow you just one mistake. Just one. After that—"

Duffy's lips curled sarcastically.

"I don't intend to make mistakes," he said. "I don't intend to be just another medical mediocrity. I'm going to the top! I've got everything planned out, and that's the way it's going to work. Of course, if I should be prevented from graduating"—he sneered.

The dean went back to his papers. He rifled through the official records of Sam Duffy, medical student.

"You will graduate," he said coldly, with a gesture of dismissal. "God forbid I'm going to recommend you."

AT LEAST A hundred young medical students thronged the balcony of the operating theater at Central Medical Center.

There was to be a great brain operation today. An operation on Cornelius van Schuyler, the city's leading banker. And van Schuyler's son-in-law, thirty-five year old Dr. Samuel Duffy, had elected to perform the difficult surgery.

"Perform" was the right word. Every act of brilliant Dr. Duffy was a curtain-raiser all its own. He had the finest society practice in town. He moved in a fast-living, hard-drinking social set—yet was always at his Park Avenue office punctually at ten to minister to the complaint of overweight dowagers.

"Sam," said his chief assistant, an able surgeon ten years Duffy's senior, "don't you think this brain job is—well, a trifle risky?"

He eyed Duffy shrewdly, apprehensivle. Sam Duffy had been out the night before, and he showed it this morning rather worse than usual. His eyes were red-rimmed, a little cloudy. His fine tapered hands hung a little uncertainly at his sides.

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"Risky?" laughed Dr. Samuel Duffy, who had not had a tough operation in three years. "Hell, I did harder jobs than this when I was an interne. Besides, I promised the old guy I'd get him well quicker than that mush-mouthed brain specialist he first consulted."

"That's just it," muttered the assistant under his breath. "It's too much of a family matter."

"You think I've lost my touch, eh?" sneered Duffy, with a sideward twist of his mouth, as the two of them marched into the operating theater.

"DUFFY!" barked the senior resident at Central Medical Center.

An old man of forty-seven looked up from his pail and mop. His face was lined and bitter, his blue eyes a little vague, a little frightened, as though life had given him an uncommonly raw deal. Hair straggled in grayish-white strings down his frayed attendant's collar.

"Yes, sir," said Sam Duffy nervously. "Is—is something wrong.

"Hell, no," said the senior resident gruffly. Then, a little more kindly, "Duffy, the woman in Room 308, Ward Ten, passed out a couple of minutes ago. Clean the place up will you, like a good fellow? It's been reserved for another patient."

"Yes, sir," said Duffy meekly, and scuttled off to his task.

The resident shook his head as he turned to the young interne who had been admitted for duty that day.

"A damn shame," the man who was Duffy's boss explained. "That fellow Duffy was once the highest-priced doctor in town."

The young interne's mouth opened.

"Huh? *Him* a doctor!"

"That's right. Samuel Duffy, M.D. And don't think his license has been revoked, either. He can still practice. Only—well, the poor guy is absolutely scared of his own shadow. He wouldn't even take a cinder out of your eye."

The interne stared down the corridor after the hurrying Duffy.

"That's the damndest story I ever heard."

"Yep." The resident pursued his lips. "Duffy's only forty-seven, but he looks and acts like he was sixty. You see, when he got out of medical school, he worked his way into the social set—got mixed up with a blonde named Gloria van Schuyler.

"The girl's old man set him up in practice. Duffy did well for himself, too, made a young fortune. But you know that society crowd—hard drinkers, anything for a party and a laugh. Well, Duffy let his tough cases go to his assistant, concentrated on dowagers who fell for his 'bedside manner'."

"So he lost his touch," surmised the young interne.

"That's it," nodded the senior resident. "The payoff came when old van Schuyler came down with a brain tumor. Duffy insisted on operating himself. Well, his hand slipped. The old boy died on the operating table. The story is, Duffy had been out on a bat the night before."

The interne thought that over for a bit. Then his brows formed a V.

"But heck—how come he's working here now, just another hospital drudge?"

The senior resident's eyes were moody.

"He went downhill like a sky-rocket, after that mistake. Practice folded up like an accordion. That wife of his ran off with a gigolo. All his fair-weather friends gave him the gate. So—well, he's been a cleaner here for the last eight years, I think."

The young interne put his hand on

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the other's sleeve.

"Say, Doctor—you certainly know the whole story."

"I ought to," the senior resident said softly. "My Dad told it to me years ago, when I was going to medical school. Dad, you see, was the dean of the medical school. In fact, Samuel Duffy was once one of his most brilliant students."

* * *

"SAM," exclaimed Mrs. Duffy as she came into the living room, her supper dishes stacked away, "aren't you feeling well?"

Sam Duffy started as though coming out of a trance. A trance?

He glanced frightenedly, furtively about the room. There was no time-machine in sight. Everything was exactly as it had been for more nights, and more years, than he could remember. Yet somehow he knew that he had been through a terrible experience—

Yes, he remembered now. He'd sent the young man away. Shouldn't have done that. Should have smashed the machine. It could drive men mad . . .

"Why, where is that young man?" Mrs. Duffy looked nervously at her husband. "I didn't hear him leave." She glanced about the room, but failed to see the odd-looking contraption the young man had brought with him.

"Gone," gasped Duffy.

"Oh," said his much-abused spouse, not too brightly, "he didn't sell it to you, after all."

Duffy shook his head, as though to clear it of thoughts his wife would never understand. Then, to Mrs. Duffy's sudden fright, he took her by the arm and looked into her face with eyes that were utterly strange, utterly unfathomable.

"Beulah," he began in a strained voice, "how old am I?"

"Why—forty-seven."

"And—and my hair isn't really white yet, is it?"

Poor Mrs. Duffy shivered. "Goodness gracious, no! You've thick black hair, even if it is a little thin in spots."

"And—and I haven't any white uniforms, have I? You know—like a street cleaner wears?"

Mrs. Duffy suddenly understood everything.

"Samuel Duffy, I just knew I should not have bought that whisky for my cold yesterday! Where did you find it—in the medicine chest.

Duffy took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"It hasn't been such a bad life, has it, dear?" he pleaded, his voice hoarse and urgent.

"Why Sam Duffy!" exclaimed his long-suffering spouse. "I do declare, you must be bewitched! Going sentimental on me, and after all these years!"

"Sentimental?" asked Duffy. Then he nodded. "Not a bad idea!"

He grabbed her and kissed her.

"Honey," he said fervently, "I'm awful glad you aren't a glamour girl!"

COMING NEXT MONTH

EANDO BINDER'S LATEST "LITTLE PEOPLE" STORY

Remember "The Little People," which made such a great hit in our March, 1940 issue? Here's another story of the fascinating little people Binder so aptly portrayed. And the new hero is a little fellow with red hair. Yes, he's Irish, and a fighter who isn't afraid to face the BIG people!

BIG JUNE ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 20

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IF THE SUN TURNED GREEN

By Lyle D. Gunn

ON DECEMBER 4th of that year, people saw the first sign of the change. The sun was tinged with green!

A few paused to wonder; most hurried on about their day's affairs.

But on the following day the sight was more arresting. Over the great solar orb, as if it were a snake's eye, a thin green membrane had blinked shut!

Through it, very faintly, shone the normal yellow light. As the week wore on, that too vanished. The sun was a solid green disk—like a space-port looking out on some distant corner of space where Nature had run wild!

In the nightmarish glow that had taken the place of accustomed daylight, the alarm of the public grew. There was no word from the great observatories. That silence spread panic. Religious fanatics proclaimed that the Day of Judgment had come!

Meanwhile, another phenomenon went almost unregarded. People expect the unexpected where the weather is concerned. *But the world was steadily growing warmer.*

Christmas parties were held outdoors on verdant lawns. Trees put out new leaves and flowers blossomed in a second Spring. And on New Year's Day, an iceberg was sighted from the boardwalk at Atlantic City!

No longer could the public be kept in ignorance. The polar ice caps were melting!

As the oceans began to rise, hurried orders were given to evacuate all coastal cities. But the task of moving the millions inland produced a crisis in transportation facilities. Food shortages developed—and to the tens of thousands who died of starvation were added those trapped when the first huge tidal waves raced down Manhattan's canyons!

On the high plateaus above the new Inland Sea, refuge was found at last under the green sun. And there science's last uncertain word was heard. The color of the sun was the effect of increased output of heat—and it was possibly on the way to the "blue heat" point of such stars as Rigel with its temperature of 16000° Absolute!

No one had ever known what maintained the sun's great mass of six billion trillion tons in its fine thermodynamic balance between the opposing forces of gravity and radiation pressure. And now no one could say where a new balance would be found.

But the word of the scientists was not needed to show that the sun was getting still hotter! The plateaus were turning into steaming jungles!

Somehow, civilized man managed to survive that first plunge back to primitive conditions, to hold his own against the beasts that lurked in every copse of giant ferns, the snakes that silently dropped down from overhanging branches. But the temperature kept rocketing, until the surface of the earth became a veritable furnace! No man could breathe that searing air and live!

Then *into* the earth man went, and for a while was safe in burrows beneath the mountains. There he brought forth his children in darkness, tried to preserve his last vestiges of humanity.

But still the sun grew hotter.

Visibly now it was expanding, becoming a monstrous shapeless blue-green blob. The face of the earth was one barren, blackened ruin.

And then the earth itself began to go.

The very elements that made it up began to fuse! Great fissures opened in the ground and molten metals poured in on man in his last refuge! All life was wiped out. . . .

There is little more to tell. From the space-ships in which a fortunate few had been able to flee far out beyond the orbit of Jupiter, the end was seen as the earth reverted to a glowing, incandescent ball—circling a green sun.

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»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

DAVID V. REED — Author of MOONS OF DEATH

IN responding to your editor's flattering request for some of the details of my sheltered and moribund life, I have been careful first to consult my files of collected autobiographical sketches, written by the leading authors in science-fiction. The experience has made me rather cautious in writing my own.

You have read many of these sketches, and so we probably share the knowledge that our favorite authors are remarkable people. They live in picturesque villas on top of deserted mountains, they collect de-coded Sanskrit, ride unbroken Arabian horses, breed hooded cobras. Their lives, at worst, are fascinating sagas of adventure and romance. Some flew for General Hop in obsolete airplanes, some poisoned the customs guard in Nova Zembla, some lay fever-ridden in the Congo while the native drums beat a hollow tattoo, some caught the hoof-and-mouth disease in Patagonia. Or so, approximately, they say.

I am not necessarily implying that their stories are untrue; on the other hand, I have met some of these remarkable people, and sometimes I think their best fiction lies in their autobiographical accounts. I have in mind at the moment, and it gives me scant pleasure, the beefy image of a certain writer who has, with the aid of a weak Scotch, grown a family tree in five minutes, complete with heraldry and ancestors who include William I through General Lee.

My own life, by comparison, emerges as a fitful series of anti-climaxes. I have only the comfort of knowing that I have stayed resolutely within the bounds of truth. It may not be much, but I haven't the courage to buy a rusty cutlass in a hockshop and pass it off as being an heirloom passed down by great-uncle Dewey, just as the Spaniards came.

I am living at present in a quiet dell within a stone's throw of Rockland Park, a fact of which I am constantly reminded by an incessant shower of stones. My daily tasks, in the winter, consist chiefly of raising turnips which I take to the market each day in a basket woven by my grandmother, who was a Mexican and had little talent for anything else. My other waking hours are devoted to puttering around a collapsible submarine, a ridiculous contraption which will never work, and in which the U. S. Navy has shown a reasonable indifference.

The rest of the time, a lousy sixteen hours a day, I spend sleeping in a bunny-suit lined with wolf-hair. It isn't very comfortable, but I don't care.

In warmer weather, however, I am really active. I wait impatiently for Spring to simmer and Summer to spring. Then I rise each morning with the thermometer and run straightaway to the woods. Here I listen to the babbling brook until I am disgusted. Then off for a walk through our lovely woods, which extend for almost half an acre in any direction. There must be many interesting stories about our woods, but I have never heard any.

Afternoons I go fishing. It usually takes me about two hours to have all my bait stolen, but I persevere until finally the hook and the rod is gone. Legend has it that our lake is the summer home of several score man-eating sharks, and indeed, once after waking from a brief nap, I discovered that my picnic lunch and one shoe had disappeared too. I have never stopped congratulating myself on the fact that I wasn't wearing the shoe at the time, else I might now be walking with a pronounced limp.

Five o'clock is tea time, and back to my little cottage I scurry, putting up curried prawns and cottage cheese and brewing my precious oriental tea. When it's ready I wait for somebody to come along and drink it, because I hate the stuff, being strictly a coffee fiend. At six, I pour the tea down the well, and with a full day behind me, I now proceed to think seriously of working. I think about it until eight, and then I go to the movies.

And so to bed, secure in the knowledge that at least if my life isn't an interesting one, it isn't healthy either.—*David V. Reed.*

(Mr. Reed asked us to publish this little sketch exactly as he wrote it, which we did. However, he neglected to mention a few things in a serious vein, which we'll do. Mr. Reed, who made an instant hit with his "Where Is Roger Davis?" in July '39 AMAZING STORIES, *and won the merit prize for that month, has sold almost every yarn he has written, being a polished writer with practically his first professional paragraph.*

At present he is engaged in radio writing, playwriting, and is planning an invasion of the slick paper fields. He is married, lives in Brooklyn, and will probably die there. He is "New Yorker" clear through. Watch for him in the slicks, and on Broadway. He'll be there!—Ed.)

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Don't Miss These GREAT STORIES!

DICTAGRAPHS OF DEATH—by P. F. Costello (Novelet). Mr. Wu was just a little Oriental, but there was something fearsome about him . . . yes, and that something became a mighty force when the Dictagraphs of Death began recording their grim store of stolen knowledge . . . stolen knowledge that left men with empty brains!

SECRET OF THE LOST PLANET—by David Wright O'Brien (Short Novel). Three years of lonely toil were behind him, and now he was to return to Earth. But as he stepped from the relief ship, armed guards closed in . . . and the treachery of a trusted friend meant a life sentence on a penal moon. What tremendous plot threatened civilization? What was the mystery of the lost planet?

A LOST RACE COMES BACK—by Don Wilcox (Complete Novel). Three worlds lay side-by-side; the past, the present, the future. And through all three a man and a woman fought their way toward the final happiness that many centuries denied them. Don't fail to read this thrilling story of inter-dimensional worlds!

PLANTS THAT THINK—by Joseph J. Millard (A Scientific Mystery). A most amazing true story of *thinking plants*. Is there really such a thing? Is the plant world a world of intelligent beings, with which we may someday exchange thoughts? What activates the strangely deliberate actions of the Venus Fly Trap?

THE MAN WHO FORGOT—by John York Cabot (Short). When the raiders boarded Johnny Deming's space ship, he saw a sight that was burned into his memory—as his comrades were burned down horribly at his side; but then he forgot. And it meant disgrace and shame, and the life of a fugitive, until he remembered again. . . .

THE FATE OF ASTEROID 13—by William P. McGivern (Short). Philip Trent, Federation Agent, found something distinctly fishy on Asteroid 13—which had become a potential death trap for every living being on it. Yet they were forced to remain to face destruction, as slaves of a great corporation, until Trent traded places with them. . . .

LONE WOLF OF SPACE—by Joseph J. Millard and A. R. Steber (Short Novel). Almost legendary was the reputation of Suicide Larry Buford, the Lone Wolf Musketeer of the void! On the moon, Earth's first line of defense against militant Mars, he fought a lone fighter's battle to thrust back the armed forces of a war-mad planet. He laughed at Death, and Death laughed back . . . all because of a woman whose love had turned to treachery!

WAR BETWEEN THE WORLDS—by Frank R. Paul and Henry Gade (Back cover feature and article). What will the space war of the future be? Read this prophetic article of a future possibility—a raid on New York by space ships from Mars. Painted in full color by science fiction's top artist on the back cover!

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Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 3 points for each correct answer.

TRUE AND FALSE

1. Aluminum, a metal, is found free in nature. True..... False.....
2. A physical change is any change which does not alter the chemical composition of a substance. True..... False.....
3. The middle portion of a gas flame is hotter than the tip or outer end of the flame. True..... False.....
4. The law of buoyancy was discovered by Ohms about 240 B. C. True..... False.....
5. Shadow bands are narrow, rapidly moving shadows seen on the earth's surface before and after a total solar eclipse. True.... False....
6. Corona is part of the moon seen only at the time of a total eclipse. True..... False.....
7. A nimbus cloud overhead would mean the chances for rain would be rather slim. True ..... False.....
8. Fungi are lower plants without chlorophyll. True..... False.....
9. The first law of magnetic force is that like magnetic poles repel and unlike magnetic poles attract each other. True..... False.....
10. An electric current flows through a copper wire. True..... False.....
11. If it were not for the Hertzian wave radio reception as we know it today would not be possible. True..... False.....
12. An air pocket is a vacuum occurring infrequently in the earth's atmosphere. True ..... False.....

CHANGE OF STATE

There is no sharp boundary between the physical and natural sciences. Biology depends on physics, physics upon astronomy, astronomy on mathematics, and so on. In the following section you are asked to define a scientific term, and then using these and our additional letters to change them into another scientific term as later defined.

1. Change water in the form of vapor to the science that treats of the laws and conditions of magnetic force.

- - - - - ; - - g n - - i - m.

2. Change the mixture of snow or hail and rain to an astronomical optical instrument.

- - - - - ; - - - e - c o p -.

3. Change the word pertaining to bodies at rest or forces in equilibrium to the inherent property in bodies by which they recover their former figure or state after the external pressure, tension, or distortion has been removed.

- - - - - -; e l - - - i - - - y.

4. Change an element of the tin family to the ratio between light reflected from a surface and the total light falling upon the surface.

- - - - ; - - b - - o.

5. Change a device for transforming electrical energy into mechanical energy to an instrument for measuring the intensity of light.

- - - - -; p h - - - e t e -.

6. Change a perennial woody plant to a shooting star.

- - - -; m - - - o -.

7. Change a color of the solar spectrum to the capacity of a body for doing work.

- - - - - ; - - - - - y.

8. Change the periodic rise and fall of the ocean to the distance on the Earth's surface northward or southward from the equator.

- - - - ; l a - - t u - -.

9. Change an alloy of carbon to a secondary planet revolving around a primary one.

- - - - -; a t - l - i - -.

10. Change the organ of sight to a hot spring from which water or mud is ejected in a fountain-like column.

- - - ; g - - s - r.

A BATCH TO MATCH

1. A cyclone at sea.	1. Parsley family.
2. Horticulturist.	2. Camel.
3. Hemlock.	3. Skull.
4. Union Jack.	4. Typhoon.
5. New Amsterdam.	5. Carnivore.
6. Meat-eater.	6. Luther Burbank
7. Best conductor.	7. Flag.
8. Sol.	8. Radius.
9. Compressed carbon.	9. Imbecile.
10. Graphite.	10. Chlorophyl.
11. Half-diameter.	11. Silver.
12. Dromedary.	12. New-York.
13. Retarded mentality.	13. Coronium.
14. Green Grass.	14. Diamond.
15. Cranium.	15. Pencil.

(Answers on page 145)

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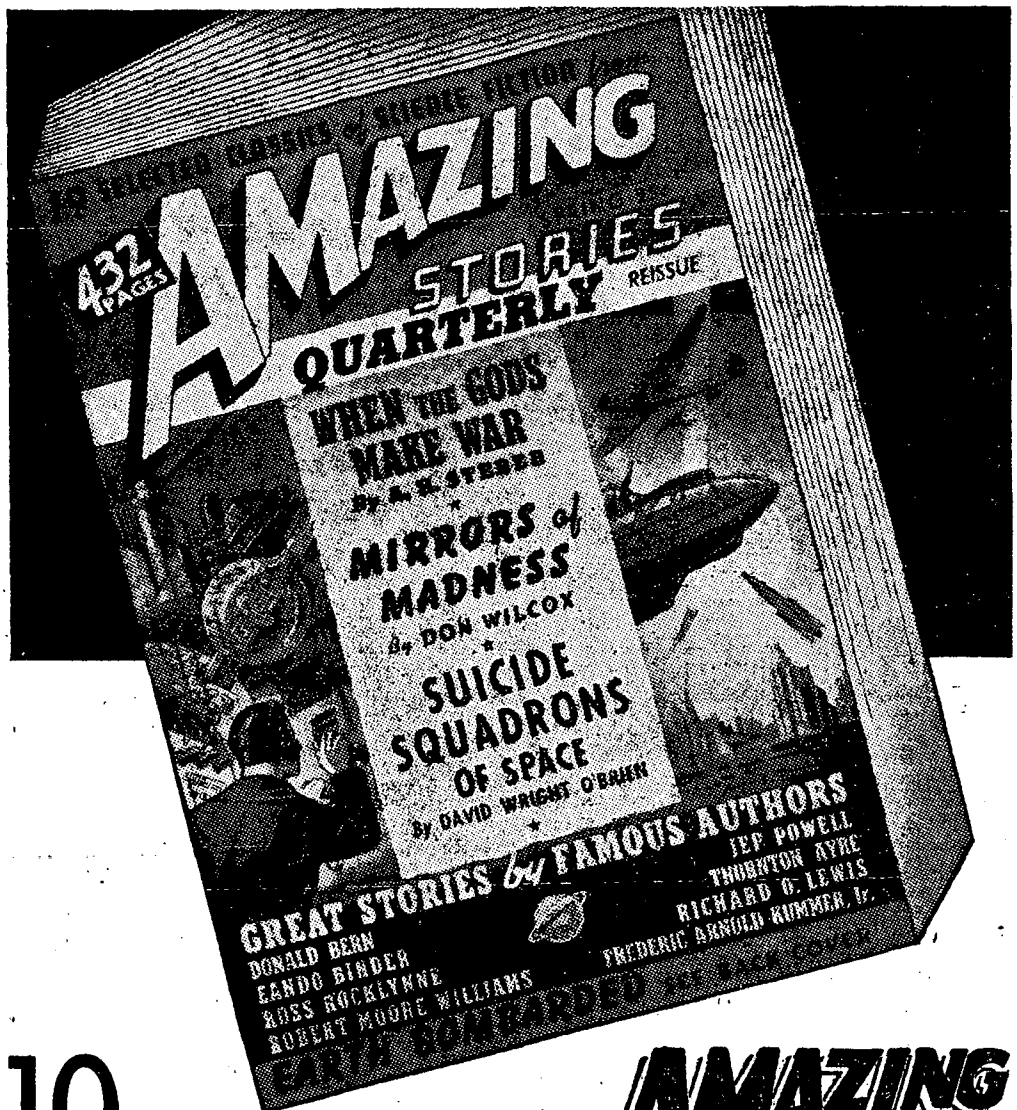

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READER'S PAGE

A LADY LIKES US!

Sirs:

I've started reading your magazine lately, and its companion AMAZING STORIES, and I wanted to tell you the stories are simply swell. There's only one thing wrong, I think every issue of FANTASTIC, and at least every other issue of AMAZING, should carry one of Nelson S. Bond's stories. Give us more of Horsesense Hank and Lancelot Biggs, please!

When will the next issue of the large quarterly AMAZING go on sale, and does FANTASTIC have any quarterly issues?

You asked if the readers wanted the Amazon's children to have any adventures. I think it would be a swell idea to have those kids grow up quickly.

I think Oscar of Mars is great also, although I liked the first story about him much better. Don't let Oscar get disappointed the next time he falls in love.

Mrs. Ernest Edmonds,
Hepler, Kan.

We're mighty glad you think our stories are good. We try to make them entertaining. Nelson S. Bond will certainly not stop writing about Lancelot Biggs and Horsesense Hank!

The next quarterly goes on sale May 14. Now that Fantastic has gone monthly, it seems probable that there will be quarterly reissues. We'll keep you posted.

Poor Oscar, he's a Martian. But maybe some of these days, he'll meet a Martian girl, and fall in love with her!—Ed.

SWELL COVER—GOOD YARN

Sirs:

It has been some time since I have written to FANTASTIC or AMAZING STORIES, but I haven't missed any issues of either magazines.

One of the best covers on your pulps, I think was on the January Issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, which was made by H. W. McCauley, and for that interesting story, "The Floating Robot," by D. W. O'Brien. It was a *swell* cover, for a good yarn.

Glenn W. Roberts,
4427 N. Parkside Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

We have received so much commendation on that January cover that we are convinced this department will be the hardest we have ever put together—because almost every letter dwells on it! How can we get variety that way?—Ed.

IN RE!

Sirs:

In re FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for January, 1941:

Cover—Ah! Another compelling cover by McCauley! And a robot with a girdle! Fancy that. The girl is nice, very nice. A better cover than your ninety-nine others!

The Floating Robot—The best story in the issue! Probably O'Brien's best to date!

The Dynamouse—Had its moments!

The Vanishing Witness—A tasty morsel! I mean the heroine. As for the story itself, let me see the original, please, Mr. Rocklynne?

The Golden Amazon Returns—Hmmmm! Yes—yes, I see that she did.

Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher—Richard O. Lewis—second place snatcher!

The Horse That Talked—Ah, ah, ah, Mr. Hamilton! Mustn't strain yourself!

Illustrations—Jay Jackson draws the way Thornton Ayre writes! His humans are as shudderingly atrocious as Ayre's use of American slang! Except I like Jackson. He has something all your other artists lack: eye-appeal!

Thanks for bringing Oscar back! And Coblentz! And I'm like Jane Ryan (whoever she is and wherever she lives!): I'd like to see some PURE fantasy, too.

Kenneth L. Harrison,
1812 S. E. 48th Ave.,
Portland, Oregon.

Hey, we just said something about the January cover. Well, we expected to have trouble. But absolutely, readers, if the following letters have been deleted, and you're displeased, that's the reason.

About the O'Brien story "The Floating Robot." When we checked up, we were amazed. The story came in first by a wide margin. So it seems we had a grand combination that time!

Pure fantasy? How about Wilcox's last two? (one in this issue)—Ed.

OOPS!

Sirs:

Have just finished the March issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and I think it was grand.

First, I want to comment on the cover painting. It was miserable. Why can't you have McCauley and only McCauley do your covers?

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I would rate the stories as follows:
1. Death Walks in Washington
2. Secret of the Stone Doll
3. Slaves of the Fish Men
4. Adopted Son of the Stars
5. Beyond the Time Door
6. The Thought Robot
7. Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock

How's about some hints of future issues?

Harry Urbanus,
15001 Lannette,
Detroit, Mich.

Thanks for the opinion on the March issue, but we walked right into something with the cover, eh? How come? Let's have a more definite explanation of why you didn't like it. How can we know, if you just put thumbs down?

Future issues? Well, take the next one for instance. Eando Binder brings back the Little People in "Wanderer of Little Land." Cummings pens "The Druid Girl," and this story is illustrated by McCauley, whom you so enthusiastically demand every month. Jep Powell does "Amazons of a Weird Creation." Polton Cross returns after a long absence with 'The Man Who Bought Mars." McGivern has written an unusual robot story that will tickle your fancy, "Sidney, The Screwloose Robot." But that's enough of the future.—Ed.

MANY PLEASANT HOURS

Sirs:

Your March issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was by far one of the best I have ever read. I used to buy your magazine only now and then, but from now on you can depend on me to read it all the time. My favorite stories were as follows: (1) "Beyond the Time Door." David Wright O'Brien turned out a masterpiece in this story. When he is at his best there is not another writer to compare with him for exciting stories. "Adopted Son of the Stars" ranks as my choice for second place. Mr. McGivern's screamingly funny story brought me much pleasure, since I am an invalid and do not get a chance to laugh very often. My third choice is Don Wilcox's "The Secret of the Stone Doll." It was really marvelous, and the last paragraph was one of the most breathtaking "punch" endings I have ever read. Mr. Burroughs rates fourth. His stories are always good, and I used to read them many years ago. "Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock" was very fine, and I would rate it fifth. I didn't care much for the story about Oscar or the Thought Robot, but maybe other readers will like them. Thank you so very much for giving me so many pleasant hours. I feel sure you will give me many more. God Bless You and good luck for the years to come.

Martin Kenning,
Chicago, Ill.

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JUNE ISSUE

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and we know O'Brien, McGivern, and Wilcox will appreciate your lavish praise of their work. They have some even better stories coming up.—Ed.

DITCH KRUPA!

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for one year now, and I am only twelve, but I think that you should ditch the one—the only—J. Krupa! He can draw machinery well, but when it comes to human figures—?? Robert Fuqua is okay and so is Jackson, I guess, although I don't like his pen technique. McCauley is wonderful. Even for my young innocent mind, that Mac girl was Yum-Yum.

Here is how I liked the stories:

"The Floating Robot"
"The Horse That Talked"
"The Dynamouse"
"Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher"
"The Vanishing Witnesses"
"The Golden Amazon"

Thornton Ayre is getting so he can't write a decent story. The Amazon surprised me. It was lousy!

Anthony Ahearn,
3170 Valhallo Pl.,
Bronx, N. Y.

Krupa will certainly read your letter, and maybe he'll do something to change your mind about his figures. Your editors think that for interior illustration, he is science fiction's finest artist. We have yet to see an artist who can approach his constant excellence. Yes, we praise our own men—but we are only repeating what hundreds of letters say every month. Are you sure you want him "ditched"?

Wait'll you see the Mac girl on the June cover!—Ed.

A-B-C

Sirs:

My two cents concerning the January FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

Cover rates B with me.

Stories, "The Floating Robot" rates C.

"The Dynamouse"—B.

"The Vanishing Witnesses"—C.

"The Golden Amazon Returns"—B plus.

"Dr. Kelton, Body Snatcher"—B.

"The Horse That Talked" is the best in this issue and its rating is A.

Have you any back copies of the AMAZING STORIES Quarterly in your office? I have gone to about ten newsstands looking for it, but my searches were unsuccessful.

A. L. Schwartz,
229 Washington St.,
Dorchester, Mass.

We have no copies of the Fall Quarterly on hand. The Spring issue can be had by addressing the

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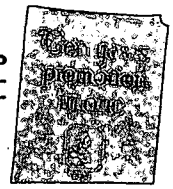

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28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.60	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
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FA IS MONTHLY!

Sirs:

I want to compliment you on your front cover on the January issue. It was swell. The simple figures, the simple but clear and distinct lines, the pleasing contrast of the figures in reds, yellows, and whites, and the background in blues. McCauley's doing fine. Keep him on as long as he does work like that.

The best story by far was "The Horse That Talked." The next was "The Floating Robot." The third was "The Golden Amazon Returns."

As a suggestion, why not have a science discussion department?

You're doing fine on your mag. Here's hoping that FA comes out monthly.

Robert R. Franck,
1530 Leimert Blvd.,
Oakland, Calif.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *attempts to steer away from too much science, and to live up to its title, which is derived from "fantasy."—Ed.*

"FLOATING ROBOT" BEST

Sirs:

I have just completed your January issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I have been reading the magazine for several issues, all being very interesting and exciting. Your last issue being no exception. I think the story of "The Floating Robot" being by far the best in months.

What I really wrote to you about was the several paragraphs in "The Floating Robot" about "Radio Hams." This really burned me up! The first thing I saw (or read) was the operator going on the air drunk. I myself have never heard of one being on the air while drunk. Secondly, you have him swearing while on the air. This being unlawful (swearing). They just don't do it.

Well, I guess I've got off what I had on my chest. Sure hope to see more stories like those in your last issue, but for heaven's sake have a heart on us poor guys. We have our fun over the air, but we don't to that.

Frank Cook,
6717 18th Ave.,
North West, Seattle, Wash.

PS—I am waiting now for my ticket and hope to be on the air soon.

It seems to be the consensus of opinion that "The Floating Robot" was an okay story. As for the misinformation about "hams," we take it all back. You are correct, of course, and we'll see that O'Brien learns the truth, and writes it one hundred times on the blackboard.—Ed.

FUNTASTIC ADVENTURES

Sirs:

On the stands, your Jan. issue sure was an eye-catcher. But inside, the contents were a bit

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disappointing. Wait a minute! Every yarn was good, with the majority very good. What I mean is that Fantastic should be called "FUNTASTIC ADVENTURES." Gone are the days of science—science blended in with a good yarn, and the days when a wizened prof could be the hero and not have to be six foot six with a shock of "unruly red hair" and built like an Atlas, with the features of an Apollo. I can easily remember when the fans wept and wailed, begging for satires, humor stories, and anything with a few laughs.

Okay. You gave it to them in an early issue—then came another—other mags picked up the thread until now I wince when I know there's a funny story in any mag.

But don't withhold any real good humor yarn, especially some by Kaletsky or Bond, though Sir Lancelot is a bit overworked.

For gosh sakes keep the spooks and boogie-woogies out. I like science in my yarns (I'll take adventure too), but please keep the walking corpses away!

I was looking over some old issues of FA and by the looks of the most recent issue, you'll never match or beat such yarns as "The Robot Peril," "The Little People," "The Man from Hell," and "Into Another Dimension."

Try to get yarns from Binder, Wellman, and a few serious ones from Hamilton. If you can get all of those "Big Three" in one issue, you can trust that you have one of the best issues of the year!

Alfred Edward Maxwell,
545 E. Madison St.,
Opelousas, La.

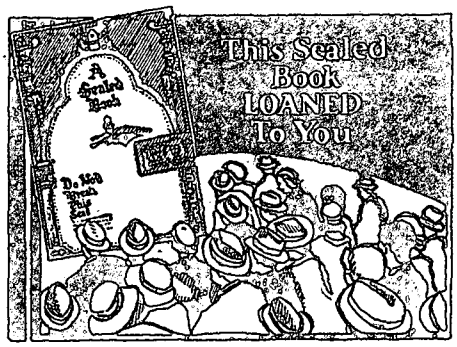
So we won't match "The Little People," eh? Well, cast your eyes over the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. *It's got a swell sequel by Binder.—Ed.*

HE IS—AND HE AIN'T!

Sirs:

I am eight years old, and I have been reading your magazine for the past ten years. I am also in the fourteenth grade. I realize that I should keep this a secret, but then everyone that writes you his age and grade gets his letter printed so why shouldn't I.

When are we going to get trimmed edges? . . . We don't want trimmed edges. It's the stories that count. . . . Yes we do too. Let's have more interplanetary stories. . . . Why do you have to print so many interplanetary stories? They're nothing but stepped-upped cops-and-robbers stories. We don't want any humorous stories. They have no place in science-fiction. . . . Why don't you print more humorous stories? Thanks for your timely yarns concerning the horrors of war. . . . Cut out the stories of future wars. We have enough of that in our local newspapers. We want to relax when we read a fiction magazine, and not be reminded of the war all the time. The Adam Link stories are the best you have ever published. . . . Why don't you get rid of that



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animated junk heap, Adam Link, and get Eando Binder to write some good stories. Give us more stories by Edmond Hamilton and Ray Cummings. . . . Get rid of Edmond "World Saver" Hamilton and Ray "Sixteen-Year-Old-Heroines" Cummings, and give Goodenough and Nutatall a chance. Hurrah for the two-way reader's department. . . . We don't want a two-way reader's department. It should be kept only for the reader's letters. . . . Who said that!

Why doncha get Paul or Wesso to do a cover? . . . Don't ever let anyone but Fuqua do a cover. He's the best artist you have. That Krupa is certainly a good artist. . . . Git rid of Krupa. His pictures look like fugitives from a comic strip. Thanks for the pictures on the back covers. . . . Cut out the picture on the back cover. I always used to carry it with the back cover outward, but now I have to carry the darn thing under my coat when I take it home.

The December issue of FA was the best one I ever saw. I hope future issues will keep up the good work.

Long live the Discussions department! May our intelligent comments ever continue to confuse a bewildered editor.

Val Vodicka,
2431 First Ave., West,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

We appreciate your very lucid letter. Only one comment baffles us. We didn't have a December issue. Or did we? Oh, skip it; we're confused.—Ed.

WE WOULD HAVE SAID . . .

Sirs:

You do not belong on the fire, on the contrary, you belong on a throne and pointed to with pride. This may sound different from my last few letters, but, believe me, anybody who can answer a letter as wisely as that *deserves* praise. I wonder what you would have said had you not known who wrote that second letter. . . .

Please bring back McCauley for the covers; he is the nearest rival of Rogers that I know of for covers.

"Slaves of the Fish Men" was an extreme disappointment after his stories in AMAZING, I can only give it third place. First place (again) is taken by Oscar. Second goes to McGivern's short, fourth to "Secret of the Stone Doll" which was terrible next to the author's other stories. The robot and time-traveling stories tie for fifth; Fuqua's illustrations were aromatic—in a skunkish sort of way—who ever heard of a robot looking for a rust spot on his nose with *all* four eyes? Last is taken by the defective story, a typical lowbrow detective story trying to go highbrow via s-f.

What *were* those two beautiful creatures doing on the editorial page? They belonged on page 150.

You may (though I doubt it) wish to know whatever prompted me to write two letters. The

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main reason for my brainstorm was to see how much you'd favor Anon's letter.

That's all for this time except I still wonder what you would have said if you hadn't discovered . . .

Wallace E. Buchholz and
Anon E. Mouse,
330 Spaulding Ave.,
Ripon, Wisconsin.

We would have said . . . just what we did. We don't give any special "favor" to any particular letter. We print the interesting ones. We don't play up the praise, and play down the criticism. In fact, we have to sometimes search for a critical letter to provide contrast and add interest.

All of which brings us to the end of another Reader's department. Why don't you get in on the fun and give us your own opinions, you who haven't written? We like to see the postman come!—Ed.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

George Schwartz, 1793 Prospect Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y., has magazines to trade with other fans. . . . Jim Jett and Paul Gallagher, C.R. Division, U.S.S. Maryland, Long Beach, Calif., are interested in science of the present and future and sports; would like to hear from those interested in corresponding with two sailors, either individually or collectively. . . . John Armand Preve Jr., East Side Dr., Concord, N.H., would like to obtain copy of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY containing E. R. Burroughs' "Pellucidar" story; state price wanted. . . . George Parras, 1544 W. Adams St., Chicago, 17 yrs., desires pen pals of either sex who are interested in science fiction or companion subjects, people, reading, astronomy, etc. . . . Marshall Arnold, Martinsburg, W.Va. (Emmert Apts.), has for sale May and September, 1927 and September and April 1928 issues of AMAZING STORIES. . . . Don Hirsch, 2910 Court Ave., Erie, Pa., 16 yrs., is desirous of playing chess by mail. . . . Katherine Baum and Kendall Morrison, 1243 Juniata St., North Side Pittsburgh, Pa., have for sale rare science and fantasy fiction books which will be sold to the highest bidder; enclose stamp. . . . D. B. Thompson, 2302 U St., Lincoln, Nebr., wants to get in touch with fans and potential fans in and around the vicinity of Lincoln; ask for "Don" at 5-7372. . . . Fred Claassen, 978 Moodycrest Ave., Bronx, N.Y.C., has for sale many used SF. magazines dating back to 1926. . . . Charlotte Herzog, 966 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., wants pen pals, either sex, 14 to 16 yrs., who are interested in current or other topics, from anywhere except the eastern states. . . . Arlo K. Richards, 710 S. St. Andrews, Los Angeles, Calif., is a pre-engineer in electronics interested in athletics, physiological and physical science, freelance newspaper writing, and radio; would like to hear from SF fans, male or female. . . . Ed Connor, 929 Butler St., Peoria, Ill., would like to corres-

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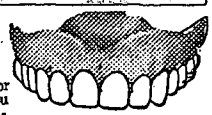

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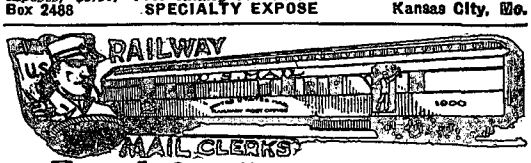

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pond with young ladies between 16 and 19, especially those living in Latin America or foreign lands, who are interested in sports, science and exchanging picture post cards, or stamps. . . . Bob Meredith, 624 Lavelle Court, and Ray J. Sienkiewicz, 312 E. Elm St., Scranton, Pa., would like correspondents residing in Scranton who read AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES to communicate with them if they are desirous of joining Scranton's only organization for fantasy fiction followers. . . . Sheldon Elam, P.O. Box 68, Haysi, Va., wants to hear from anyone concerning buying back issues of magazines, or organizing a writers' fiction club. . . . Earl H. Williams, 1512A State St., East St. Louis, Ill., 30 yrs. of age, would like to receive letters from both sexes, and will reply to all. . . . Leslie McCarthy, 587 21st Ave., Rock Island, Ill., would like to receive the March and June 1940 issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. . . . Solomon Kaplan, 3204 Holland Ave., N.Y.C., 19 yrs., would like correspondents of either sex, anywhere, who are interested in stamps, music and art. . . . Kenneth Nahan, Box 305, Westfield, N.J., is interested in hearing from anyone in Canada, South America, Alaska and abroad; he would like to discuss current affairs, philately, writing and science. . . . Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., has for sale SCIENTIFIC ENCYCLOPEDIA. . . . Fred Heinichen, 152 W. 62nd St., N.Y.C., would like to hear from young men between 12 and 17 who are interested in joining an organization; this applies to those living in Manhattan and all letters will be answered. . . . Maxine Harrison, 4923 Stimson, Houston, Tex., 17 yrs., would like to hear from anyone near her age outside of Texas. . . . C. G. White, 27 Kineo St., Bangor, Me., 17 yrs., would like to correspond with girls and will answer each letter. . . . Claude Held, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo, N.Y., will quote prices on SF magazines he has for sale; also wants to purchase

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some. . . . Virginia Scattergood, Route No. 1, Breverton, N.Y., is desirous of pen pals. . . . Jimmy Wood, 2712 Anderson Dr., Raleigh, N.C., 13 yrs., would like to hear from readers and exchange opinions. . . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to dispose of magazines and wants pen pals interested in SF and general correspondence. . . . Dick Waite, Route 1, Banker, N.Y., will trade magazines and reply to all correspondence. . . . Joe Gilbert, 314 34th St., Union City, N.J., has traveled, likes swimming, football, hiking and music; would like correspondents interested in these activities, and will make early replies. . . . John Robertson, 1352 N. State St., Jackson, Miss., is desirous of pen pals from Australia and South America; 17 yrs. . . . Jack Clark, 962 North St., Jackson, Miss., would like to sell or trade magazines. . . . E. Evans, 191 Capital Ave., S.W., Battle Creek, Mich., would like to hear from those fans in the southern Michigan area interested in a new club named The Galactic Roamers. . . . Toby Kavanaugh, 227 S. Ashland Ave., Lexington, Ky., has magazines in excellent condition for sale. . . . Harry Docherty, 113-22 216th St., Bellaire, L.I., N.Y., wants to hear from stamp and post card collectors in foreign countries, and post card collectors in the United States, who would care to exchange these items. . . . Fred Claassen, 978 Woodycrest Ave., Bronx, N.Y., has for sale about 50 SF magazines, good condition; write for price list. . . . Robert A. Nelson, 2044 N. 34th St., Milwaukee, Wis., wants pen pals from all over the world. . . .

. . . Harry Peterson, Jr., 2221 Carmen Ave., Chicago, Ill., wishes pen pals of both sexes, 16 or 17 yrs. . . . Harry Jenkins, Jr., 2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C., wishes correspondents interested in writing and will reply immediately. . . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to obtain No. 1 AMAZING QUARTERLY. . . . Mrs. Frank B. Lapi, 311—6th St., Union City, N. J., wishes correspondents anywhere. . . .

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 134)

TRUE AND FALSE

1. False. 2. True. 3. True. 4. False. Archimedes discovered it. 5. True. 6. False. Part of the sun. 7. False. 8. True. 9. True. 10. False. Around the wire. 11. True. 12. False. It is a down or up current.

CHANGE OF STATE

1. Steam; magnetism. 2. sleet; telescope. 3. static; elasticity. 4. lead; albedo. 5. motor; photometer. 6. tree; meteor. 7. green; energy. 8. tide; latitude. 9. steel; satellite. 10. eye; geyser.

A BATCH TO MATCH

1-4; 2-6; 3-1; 4-7; 5-12; 6-5; 7-11; 8-13; 9-14; 10-15; 11-8; 12-2; 13-9; 14-10; 15-3.

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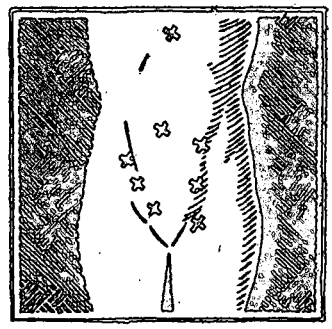

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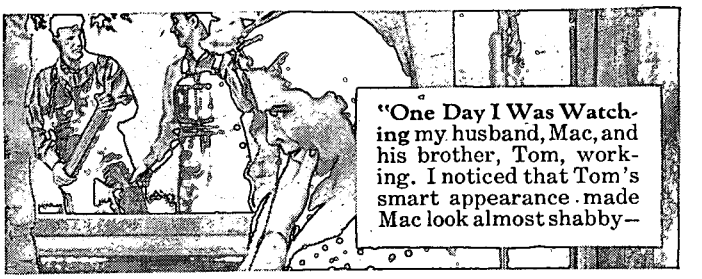

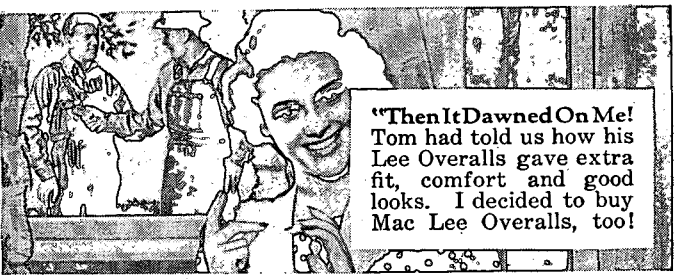

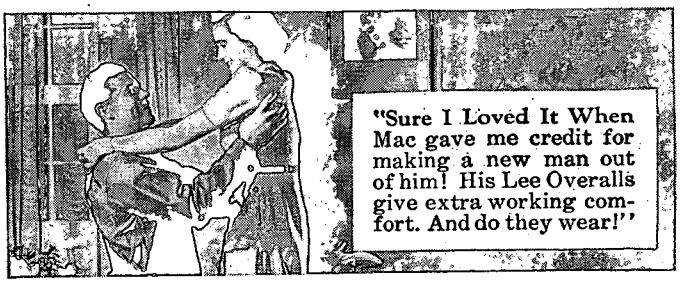

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